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APPROVED
BY THE
COMICS
CODE
AUTHORITY

STAN LEE PRESENTS:

SYNCE CITY BLUES

BENEATH THE
ABANDONED
NUEVO SOL
ARCOLOGY.

PUT THAT
RUSTBUCKET
IN GEAR AND GO,
METALHEAD!

WE'VE GOT TO
LOSE THOSE SYNCE
ENFORCERS BEFORE
ANY OF THEIR PLASMA
BURSTS CONNECT!

ONE OF THEIR
HIRED GUNS
ALREADY SHOT
XI'AN.

AND IF
HE DIES--

KLHUU

KLHUU

EXPERIENCE

KLHUU

--EVERYTHING
FALLS APART!

JOHN FRANCIS
MOORE
WRITER

RON
LIM
PENCILER

ADAM
KUBERT
INKER

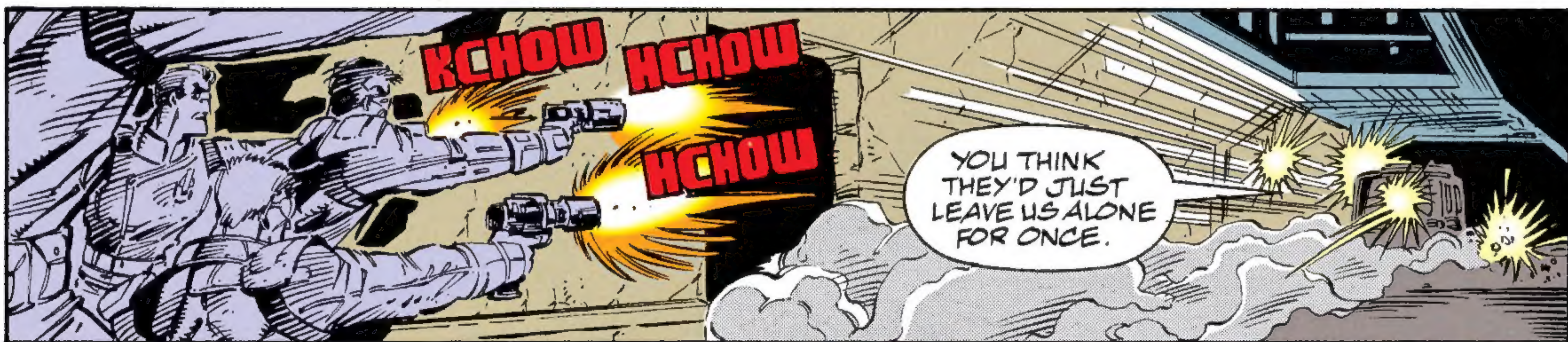
MIKE
SELLERS
BACKGROUND INKS

KEN
LOPEZ
LETTERER

TOM
SMITH
COLORIST

JOEY
CAVALIERI
EDITOR

TOM
DEFALCO
BOSS



YOU THINK THEY'D JUST LEAVE US ALONE FOR ONCE.



YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I, TINA, THE SYNDICATE SEES OUR INDEPENDENCE AS A THREAT.

THE ESTABLISHMENT ALWAYS RESPONDS TO THE EMPOWERED MINORITY WITH VIOLENCE AND OPPRESSION.

RIGHT NOW I JUST WISH I WAS EMPOWERED WITH YOUR STEEL SKIN, EDDIE!

OUR MOMENTARY DISCOMFORT IS NOTHING COMPARED TO THE PAIN XI'AN ENDURES FOR US ALL.



YOU SAVED HIM, TIM. IF YOU HADN'T STOPPED THAT SNIPER, XI'AN WOULD BE DEAD.

YEAH, I DON'T HAVE TO BE A DOCTOR TO KNOW XI'AN'S STILL IN CRITICAL CONDITION FROM THAT SHOT.

WHAT DOES NOAH SYNGE HAVE AGAINST XI'AN THAT HE WOULD HIRE AN ASSASSIN--

--AND THEN SEND HIS ENFORCERS TO CLEAN UP AFTER THE FACT?



I CAN ANSWER THAT.

ACCORDING TO THE ENFORCER COM-LINES, NOAH SYNGE IS DEAD-- VICTIM OF SOME SORT OF MOLECULAR DISRUPTION.

THEY BLAME XI'AN FOR THE MURDER.

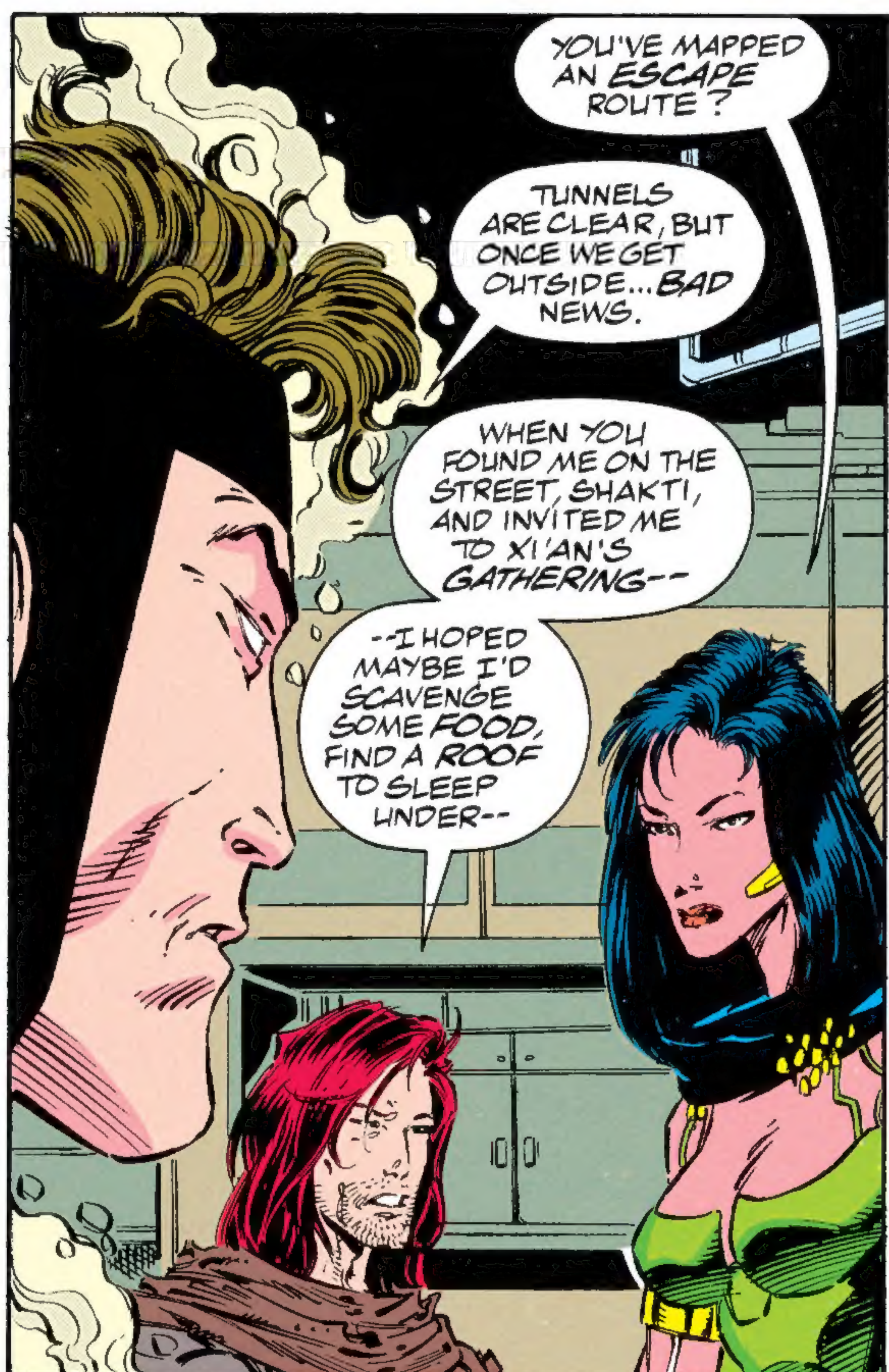
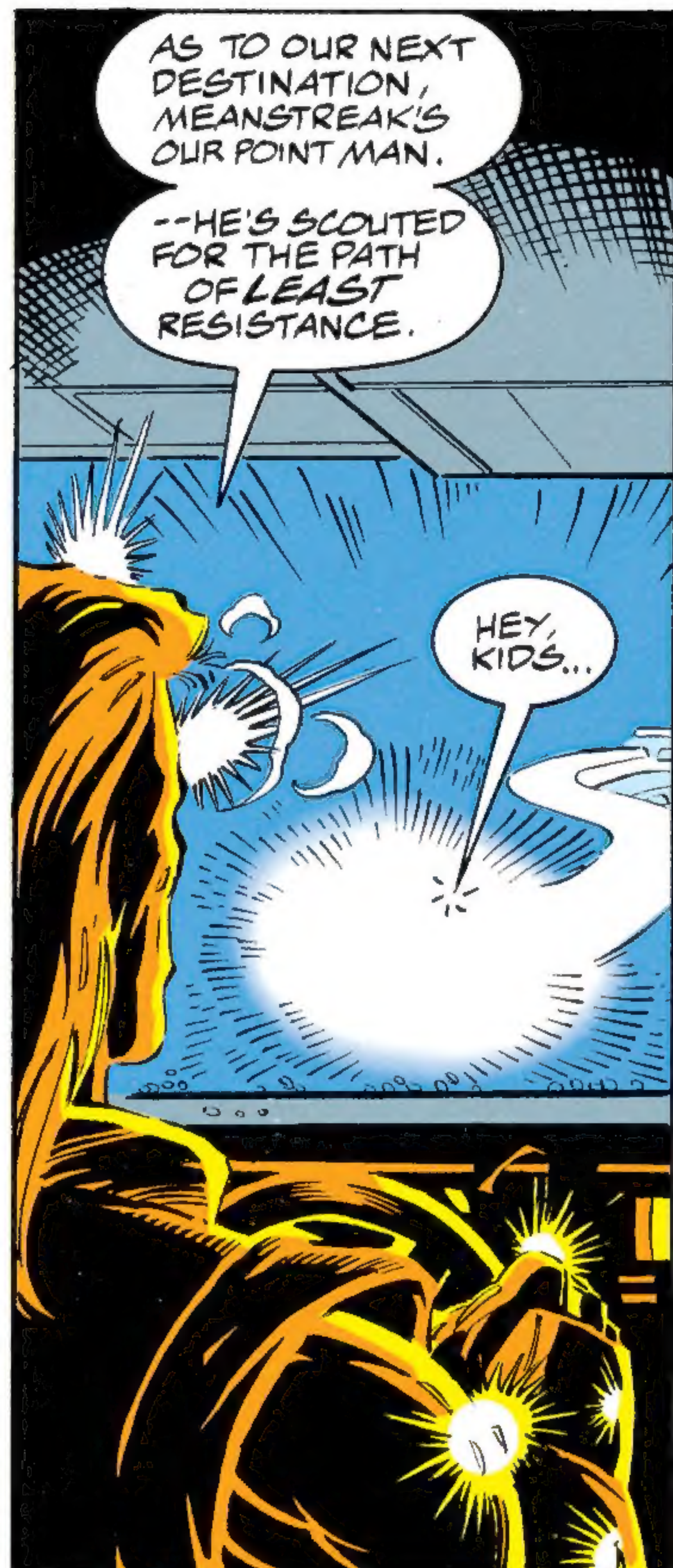
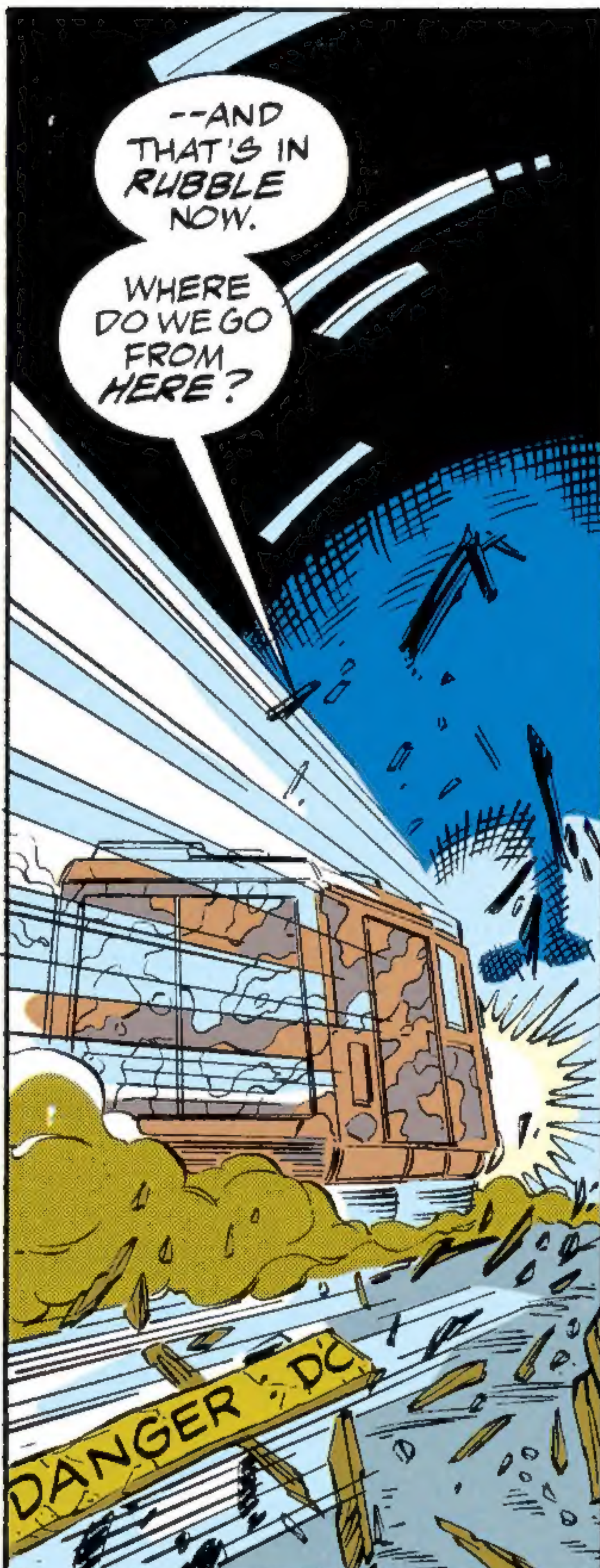


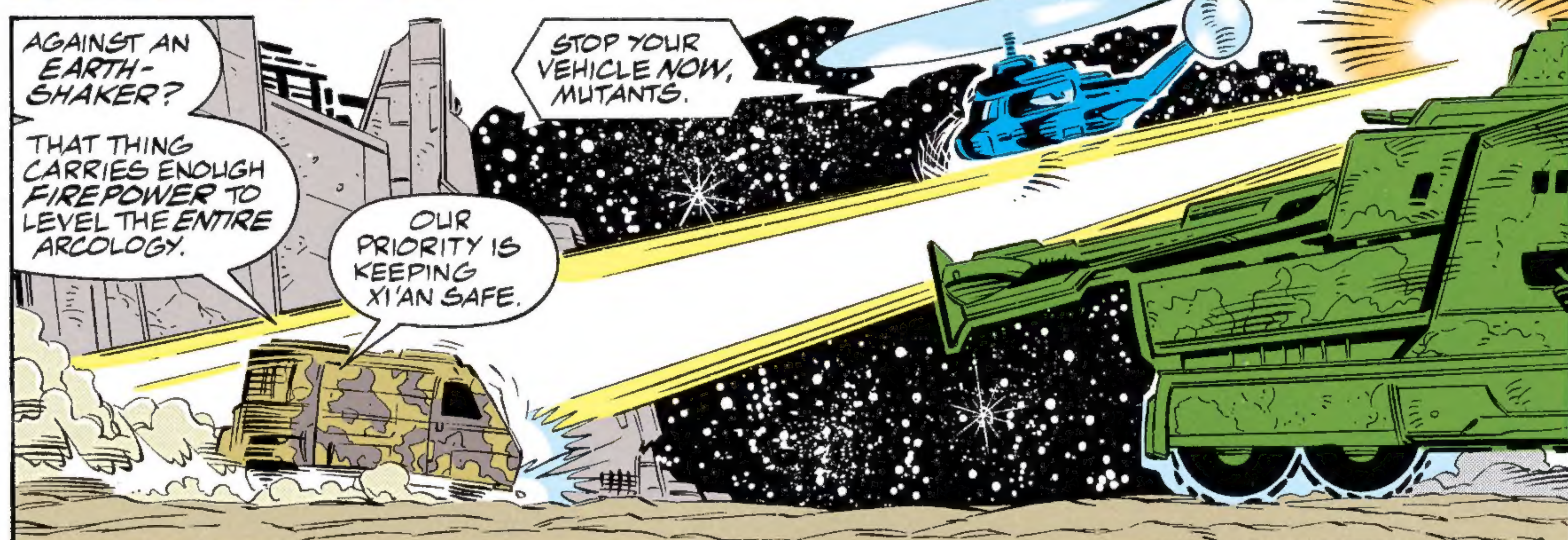
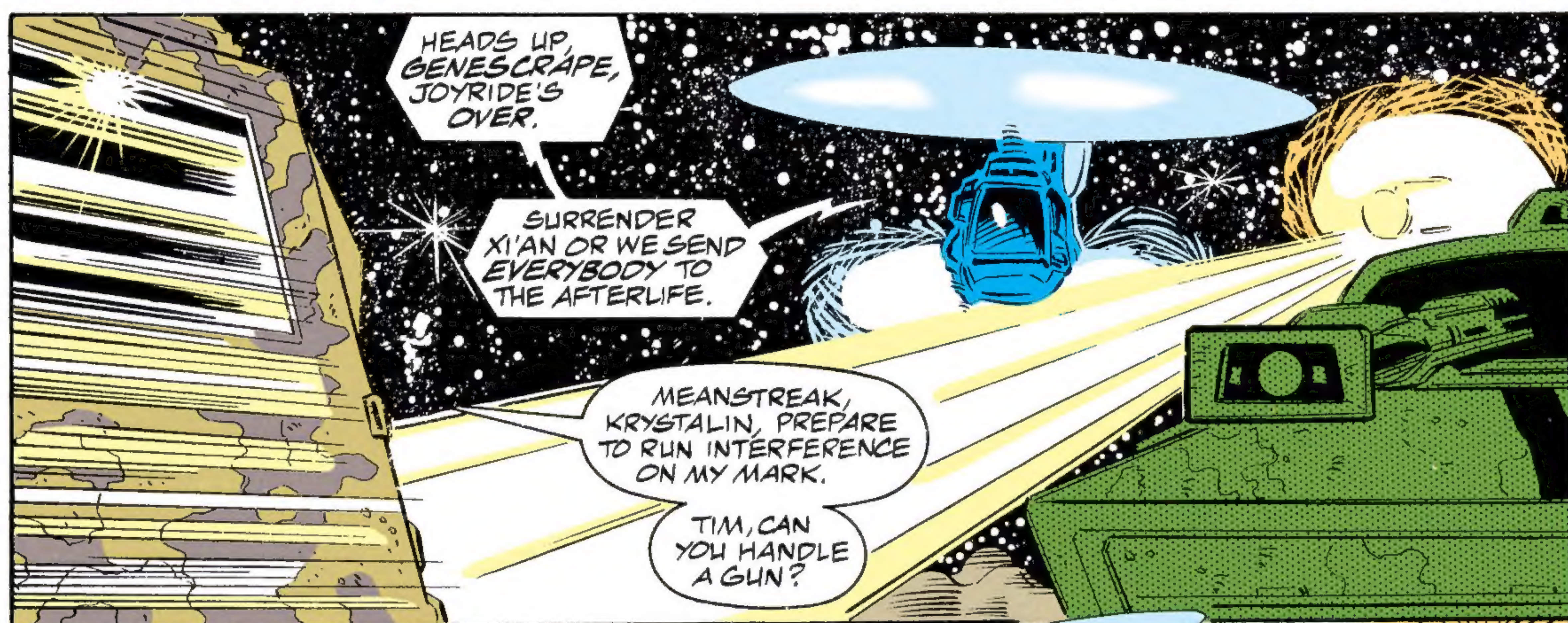
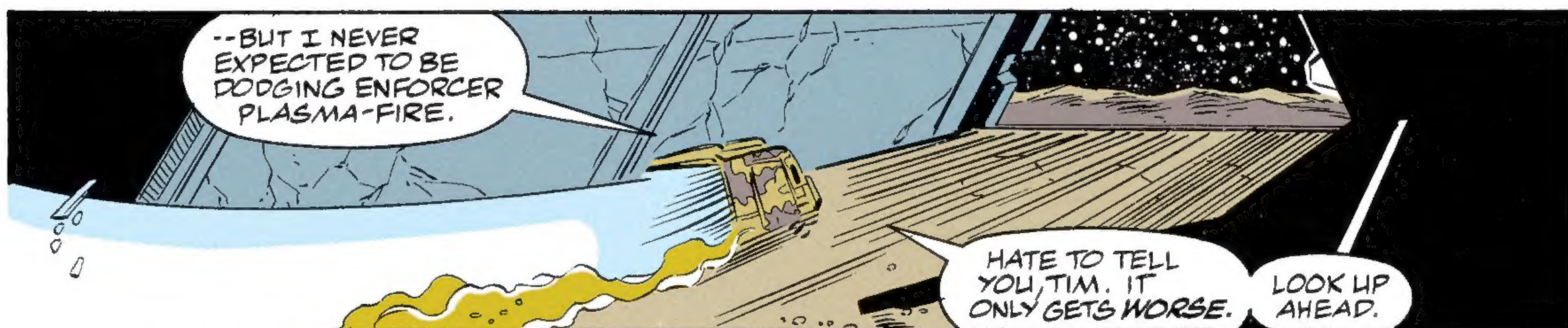
A FACILE ASSUMPTION. XI'AN CERTAINLY HAS BOTH MOTIVE AND MEANS.

HE HATED SYNGE--AND HIS TOUCH BREAKS DOWN THE MOLECULAR STRUCTURE OF ANYTHING IT CONTACTS.

SHAKTI, YOU DON'T THINK HE ACTUALLY...

SYNGE...I HAVE THE POWER TO DESTROY YOU AND ALL THIS...





YOU HAVE
FIVE
SECONDS
TO GIVE
US THE--

CAPTAIN!
AT NINE
O'CLOCK.
WHAT THE--

BA KOOOM

JUST WANT
TO SEE WHO'S
PROVIDING
THE AIR
SUPPORT.

FRITZ, YOU
GOTTA SEE
THIS --

TINA,
GET
DOWN!

IT'S
BLOODHAWK!

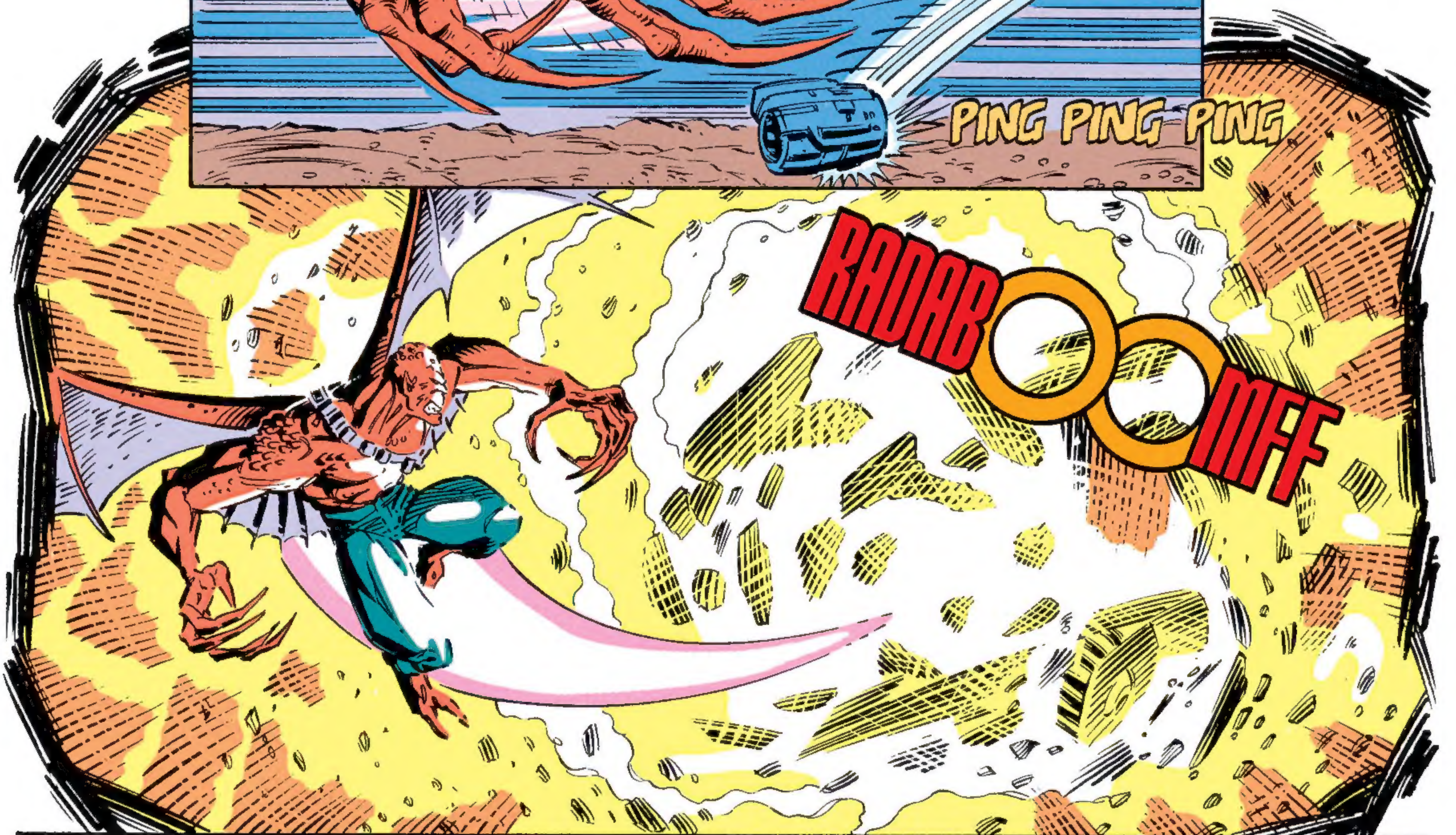
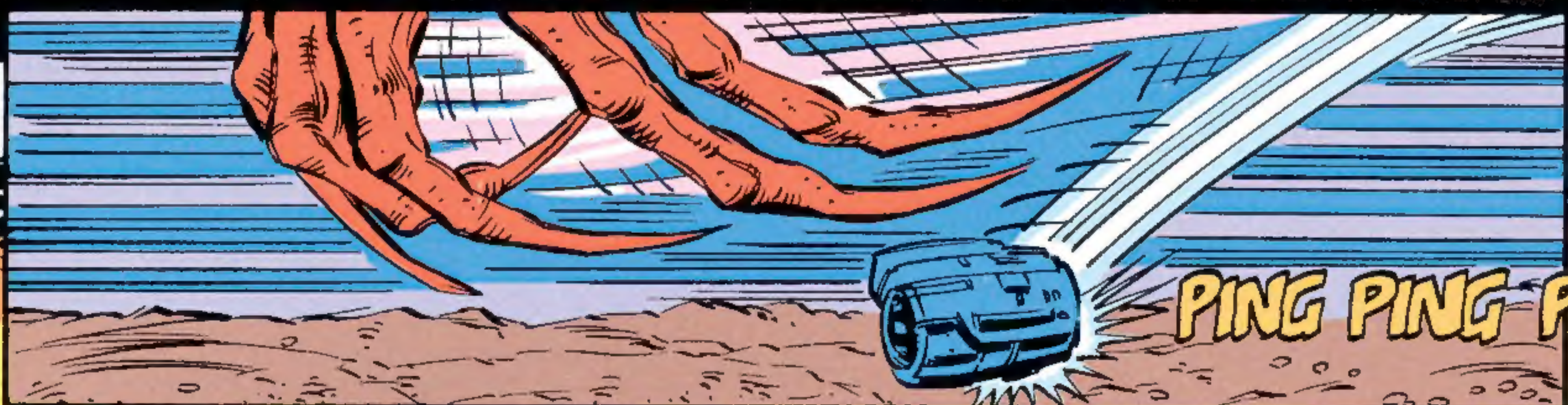
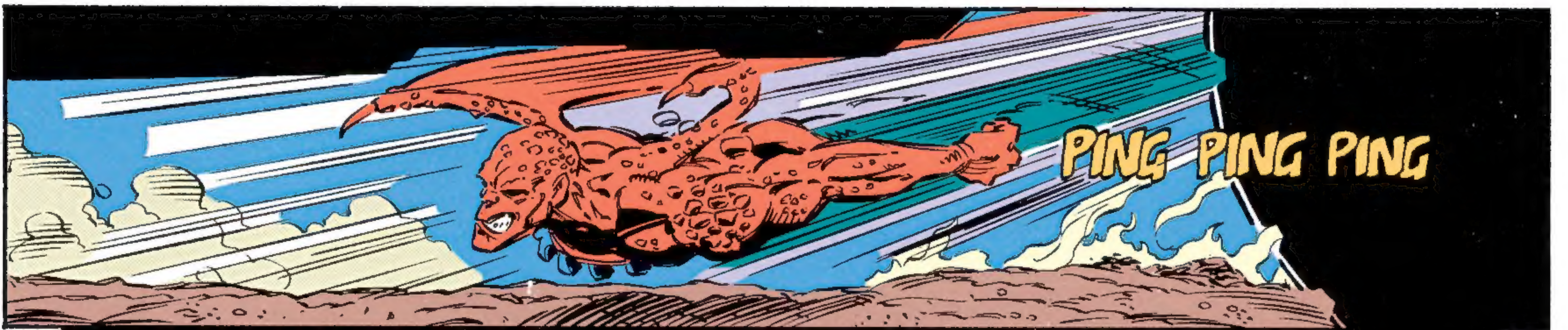
"REMEMBER
THOSE STORIES
ABOUT THE
UNDERGROUND
TESTING
CREATING
MONSTERS IN
THE DESERT?"

"THERE'S
YOUR
PROOF."

"GOOD THING
HE'S ON OUR
SIDE, HUH?"

SYNGE, YOUR MEN HAVE
DESPOILED THE DESERT
FOR TOO LONG.

KLIK PING PING PII



I KNEW THE
TRANSMORPH
WOULD
RETURN.

HE OWED US
FOR BREAKING
HIM OUT OF THE
CASINO HOLDING
CELLS.*

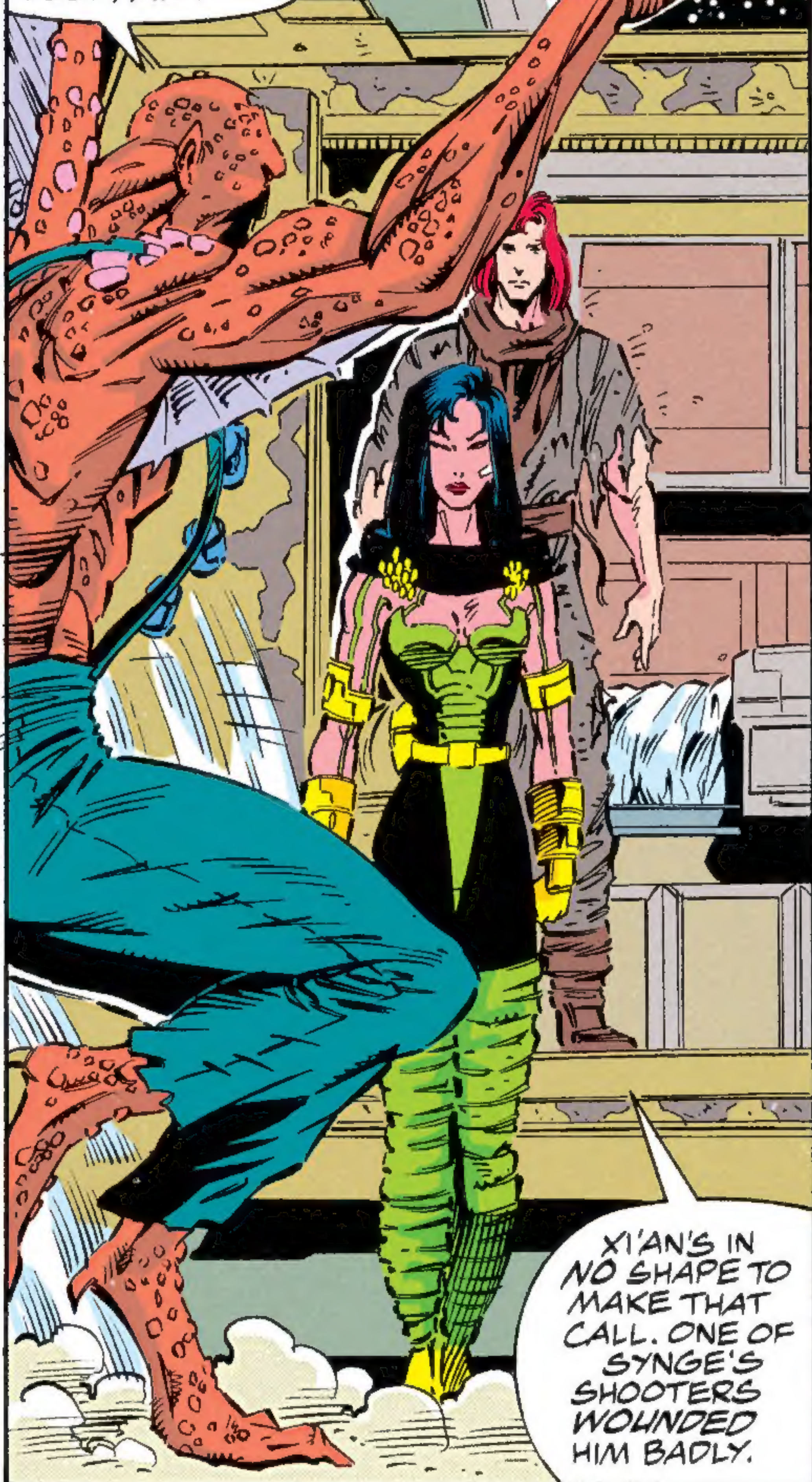
HENRI, IF I HAD
YOUR HINDSIGHT,
I NEVER WOULD'VE
LEFT BERKELEY
WITH YOU.

*LAST ISSUE.

IT WAS... INCONSIDERATE... OF ME NOT TO THANK XI'AN FOR SENDING YOUR PEOPLE TO FREE ME.

AFTER FINDING THE ARCOLOGY SURROUNDED BY ENFORCERS, I WAITED UNTIL I COULD BE OF ASSISTANCE.

I EXPECT XI'AN TO CONSIDER MY DEBT PAID.

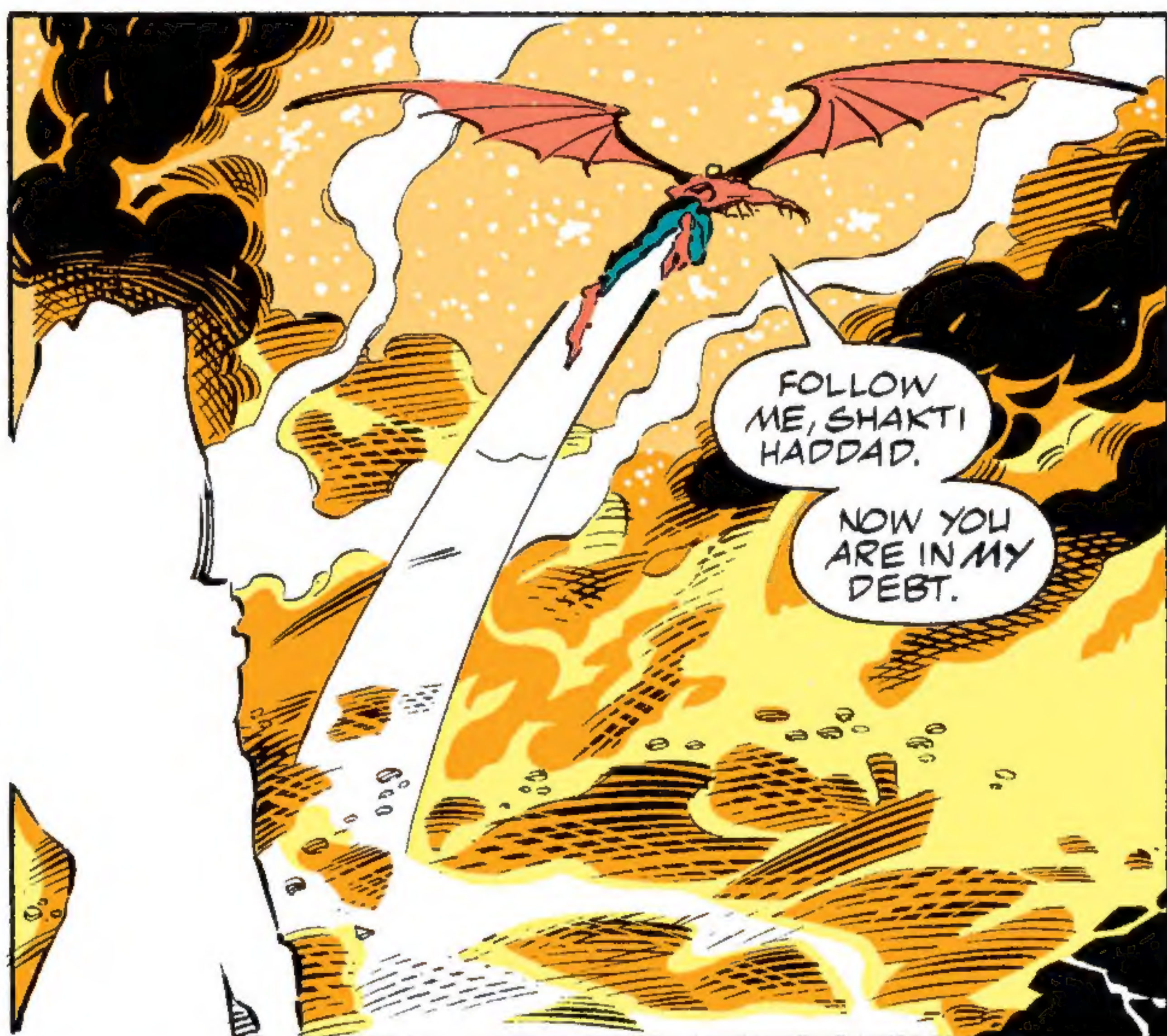
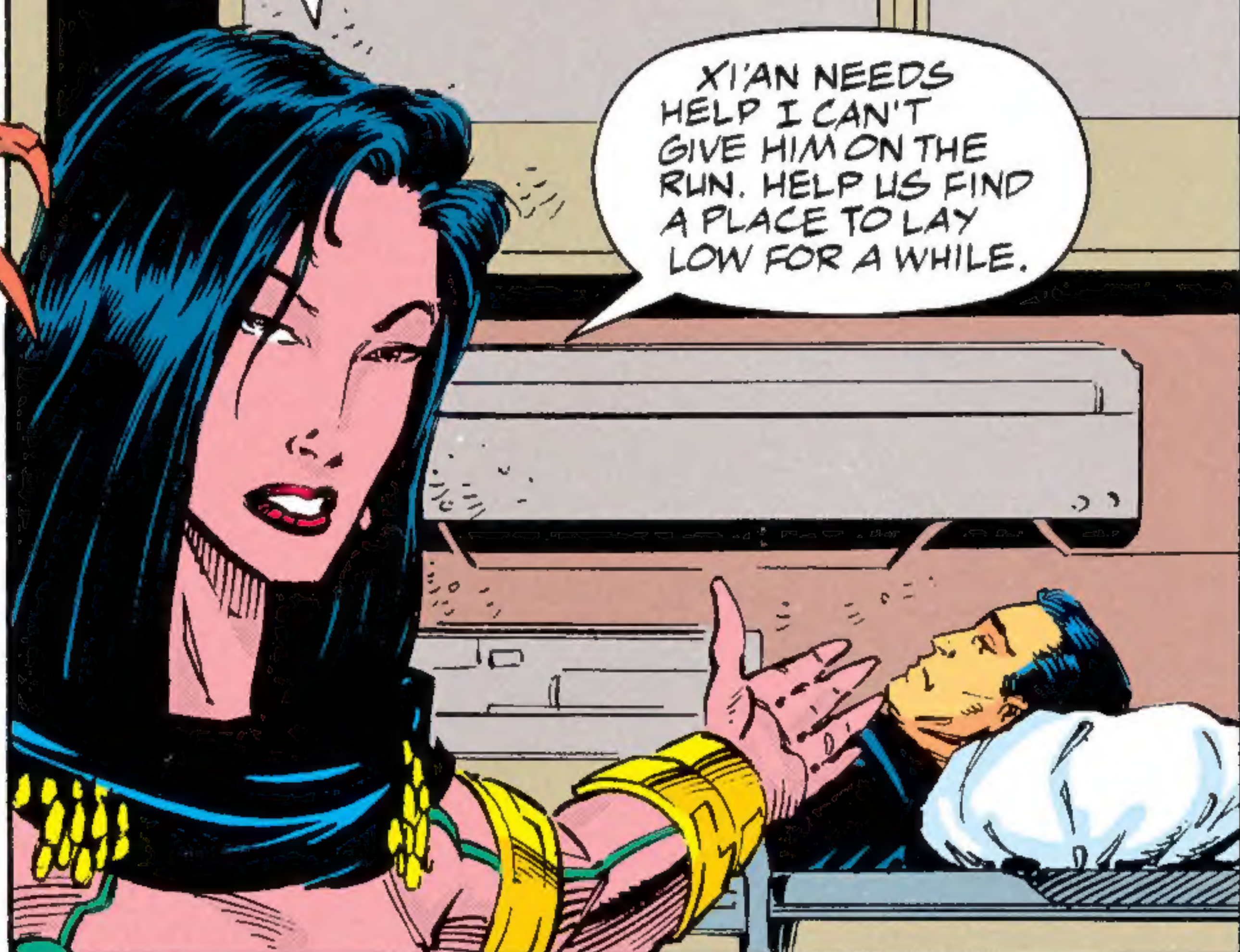


XI'AN'S IN NO SHAPE TO MAKE THAT CALL. ONE OF SYNGE'S SHOOTERS WOUNDED HIM BADLY.

THE SYNDICATE BELIEVES HIM GUILTY OF THE MURDER OF NOAH SYNGE.

THE ELDER IS DEAD? HAH! I WILL DANCE ON HIS GRAVE.

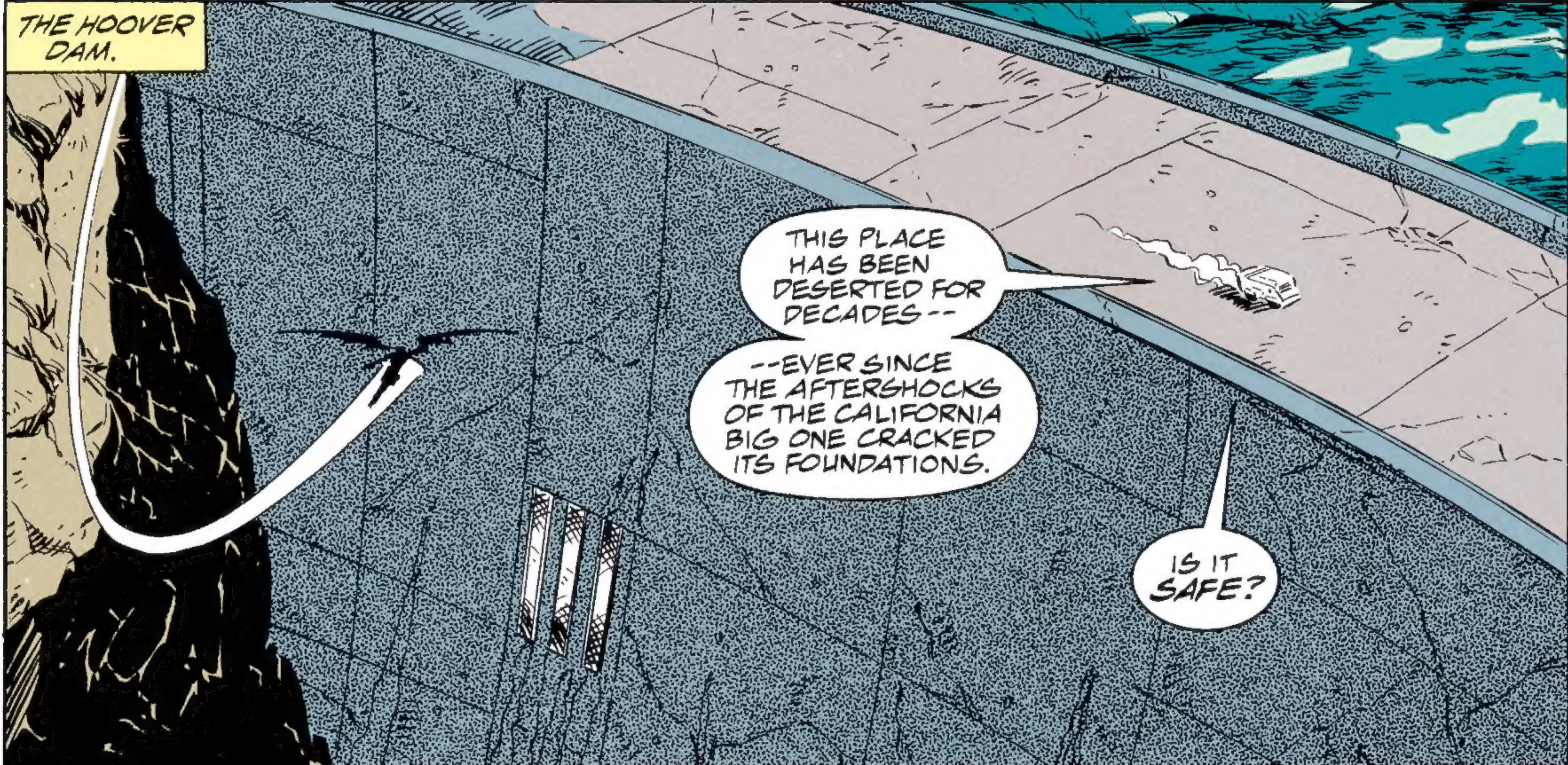
XI'AN NEEDS HELP I CAN'T GIVE HIM ON THE RUN. HELP US FIND A PLACE TO LAY LOW FOR A WHILE.



FOLLOW ME, SHAKTI HADDAD.

NOW YOU ARE IN MY DEBT.

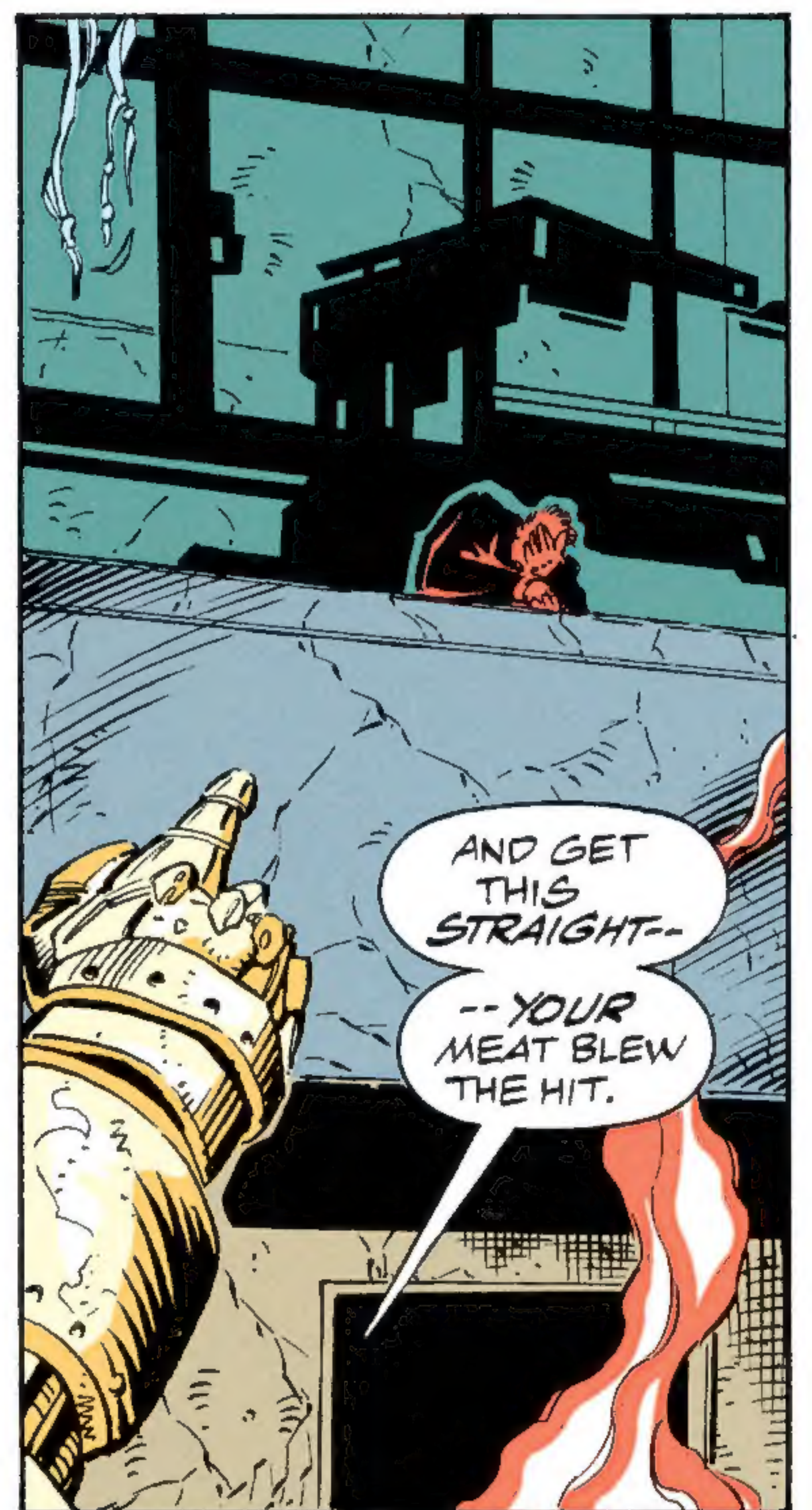
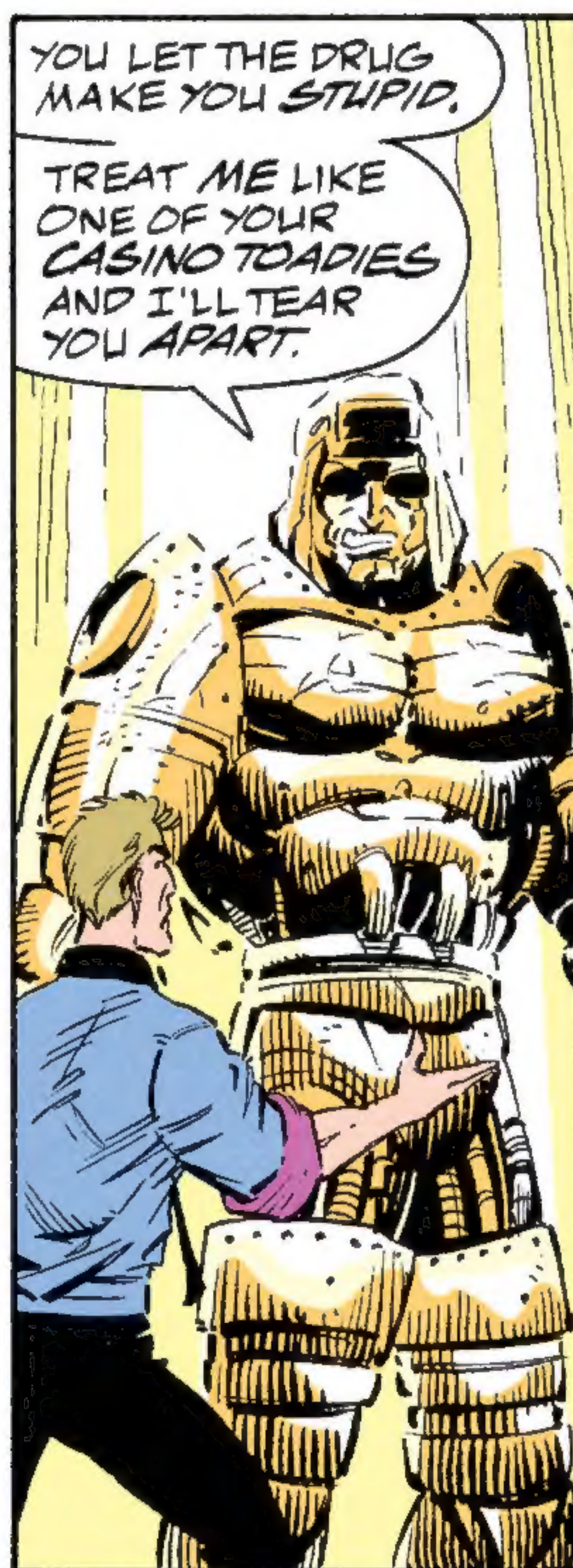
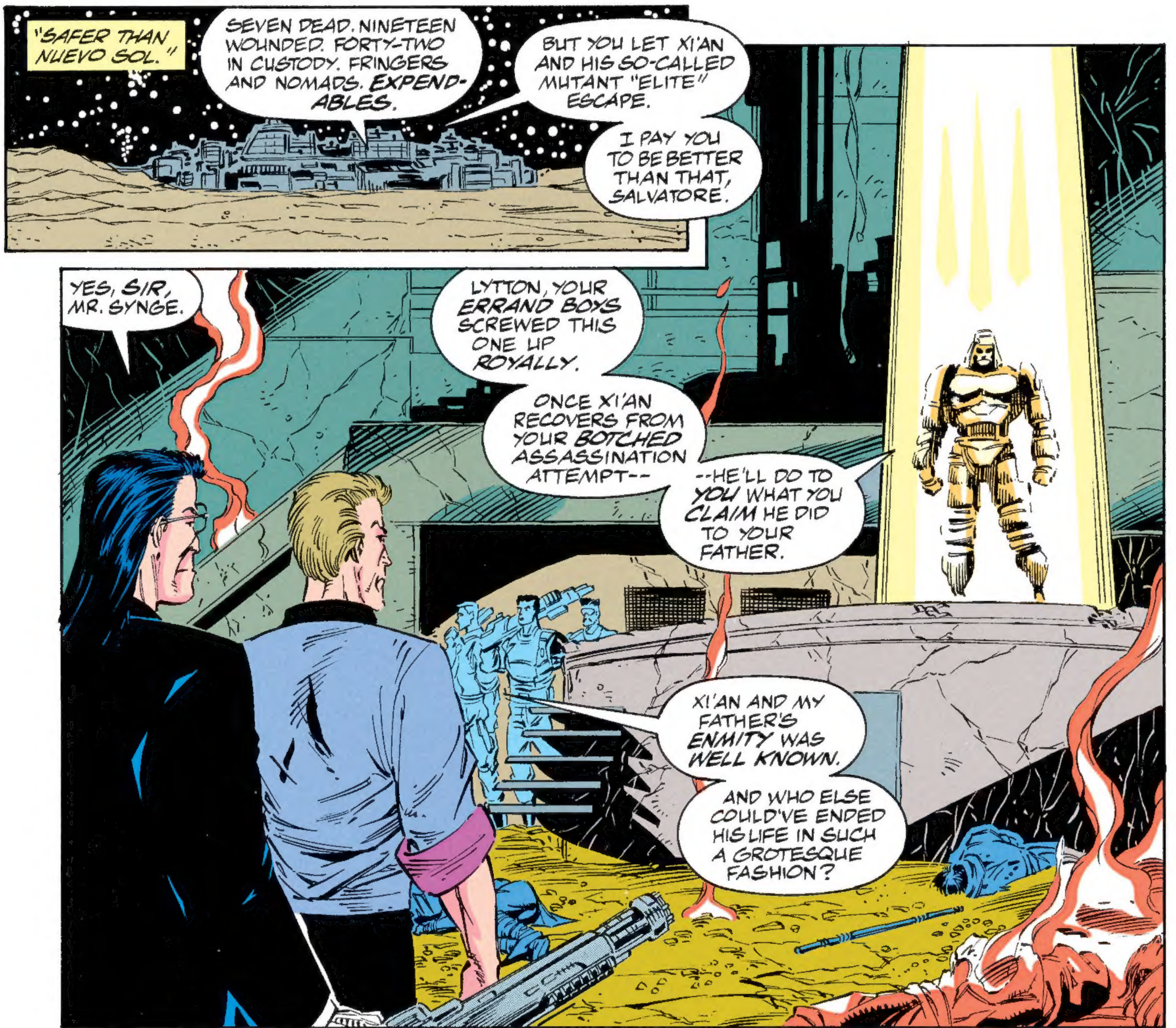
THE HOOVER DAM.

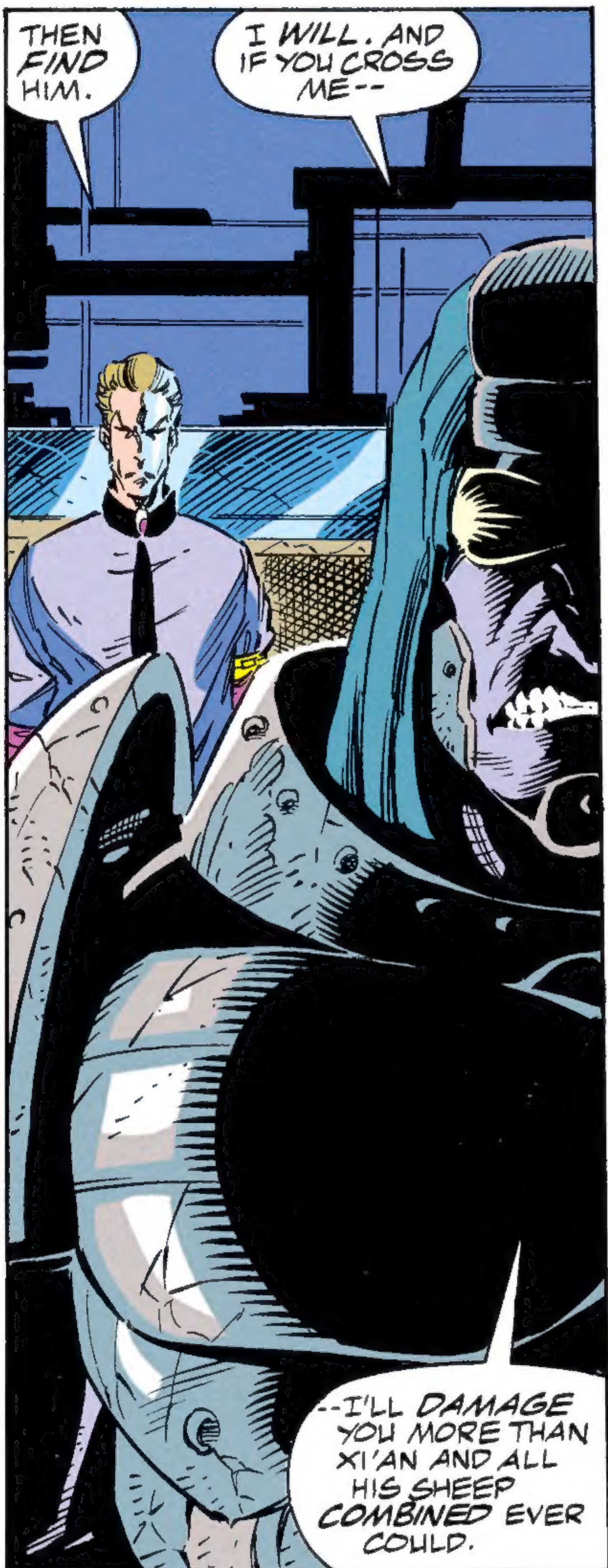
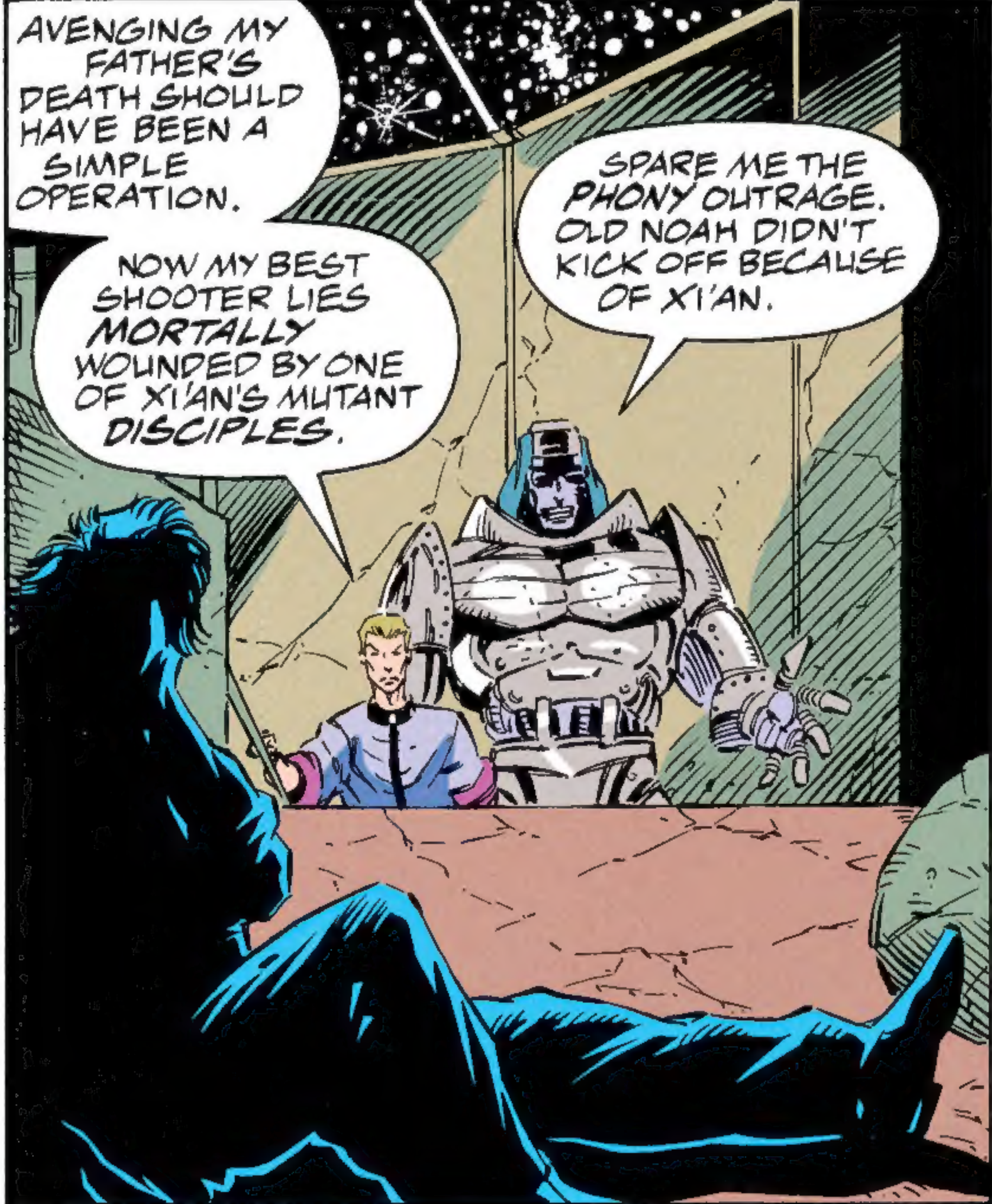


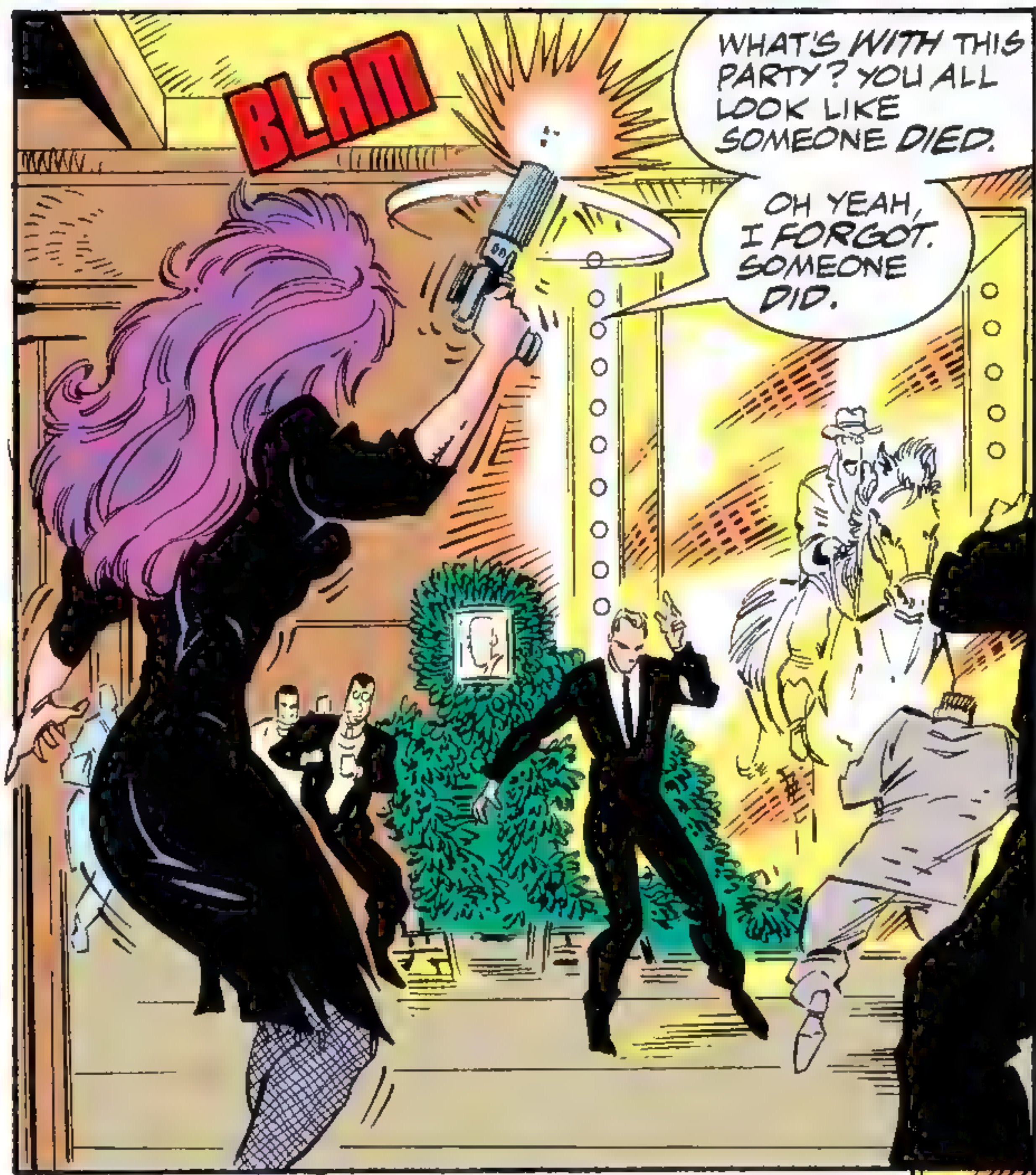
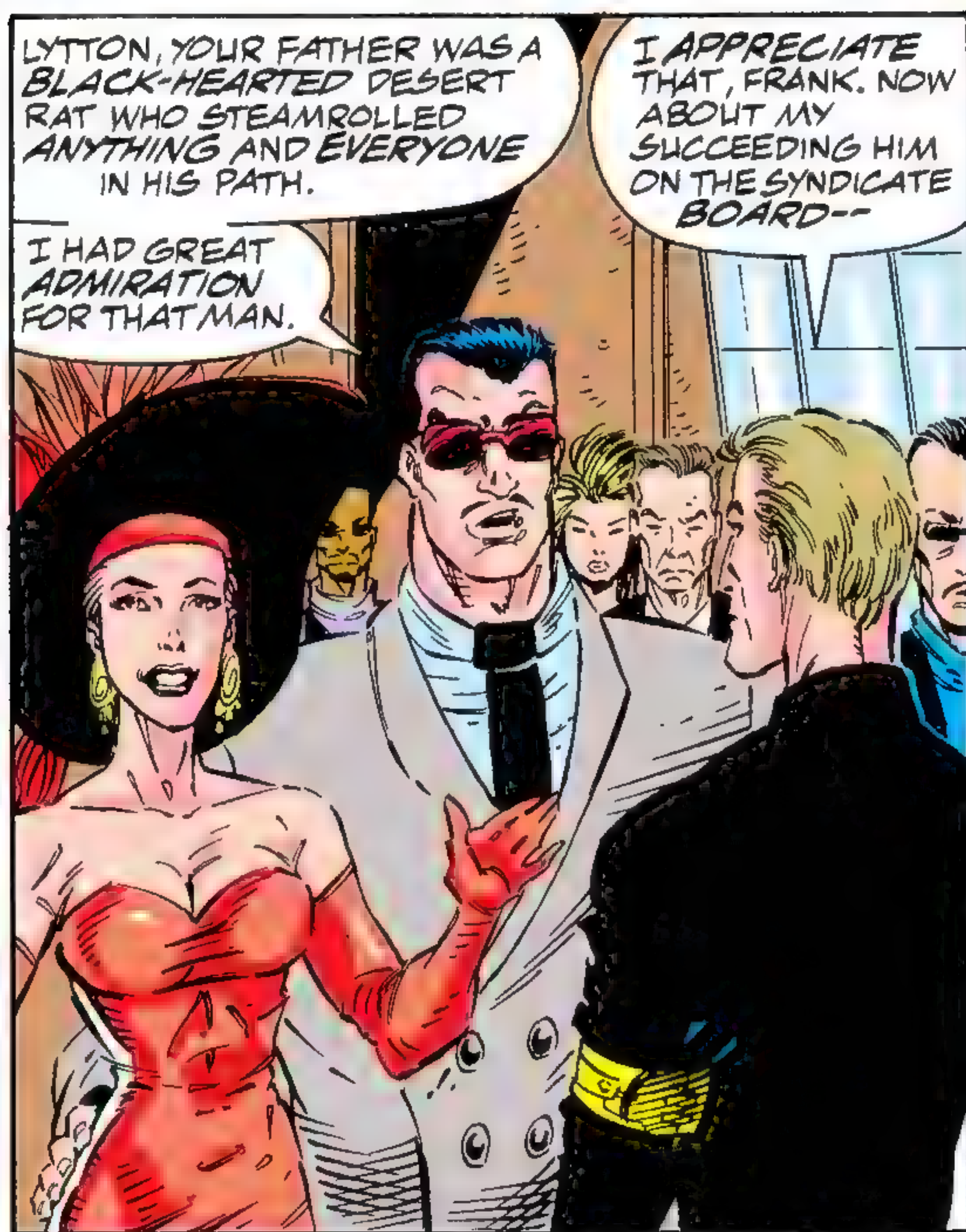
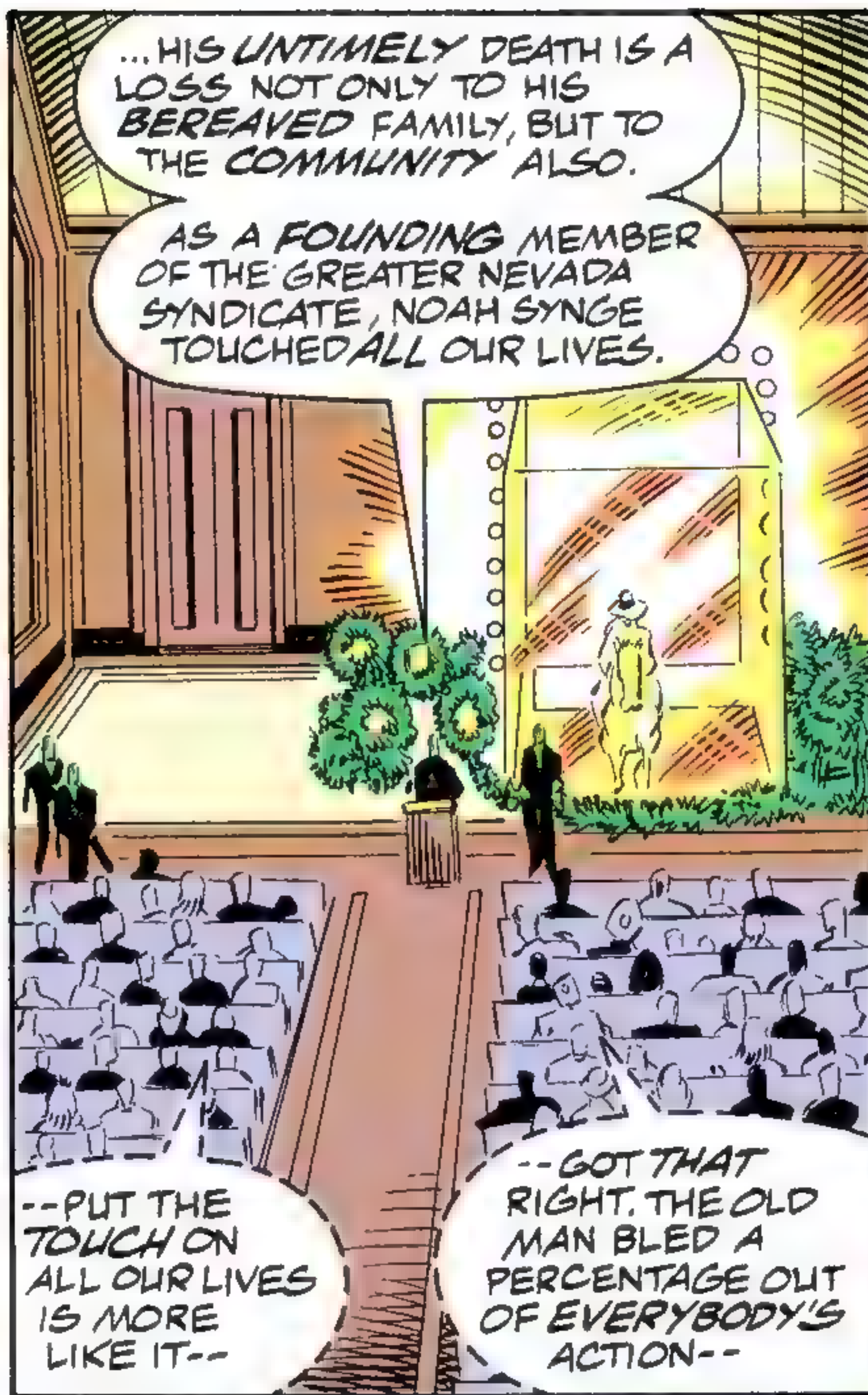
THIS PLACE HAS BEEN DESERTED FOR DECADES --

--EVER SINCE THE AFTERSHOCKS OF THE CALIFORNIA BIG ONE CRACKED ITS FOUNDATIONS.

IS IT SAFE?

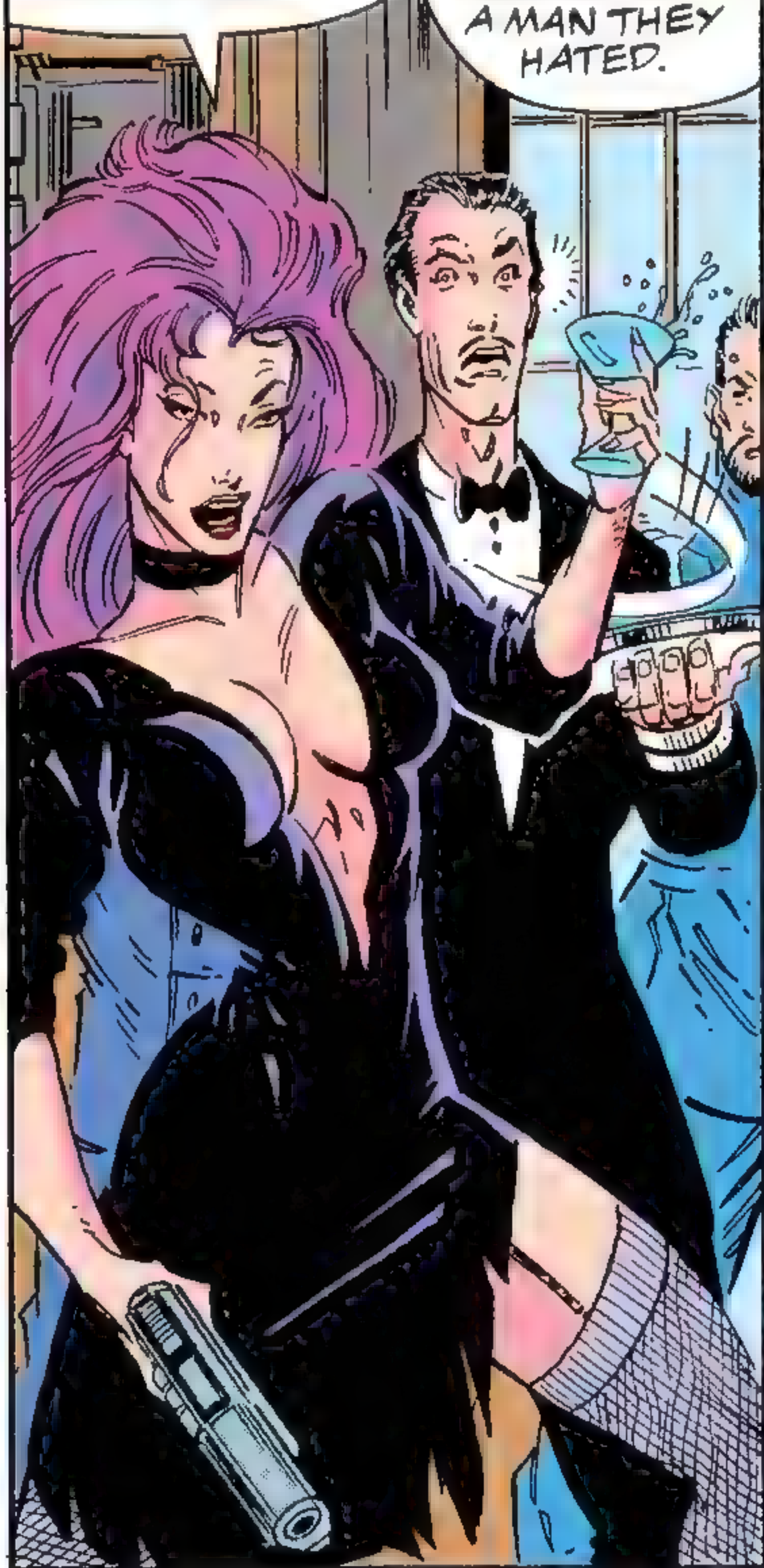






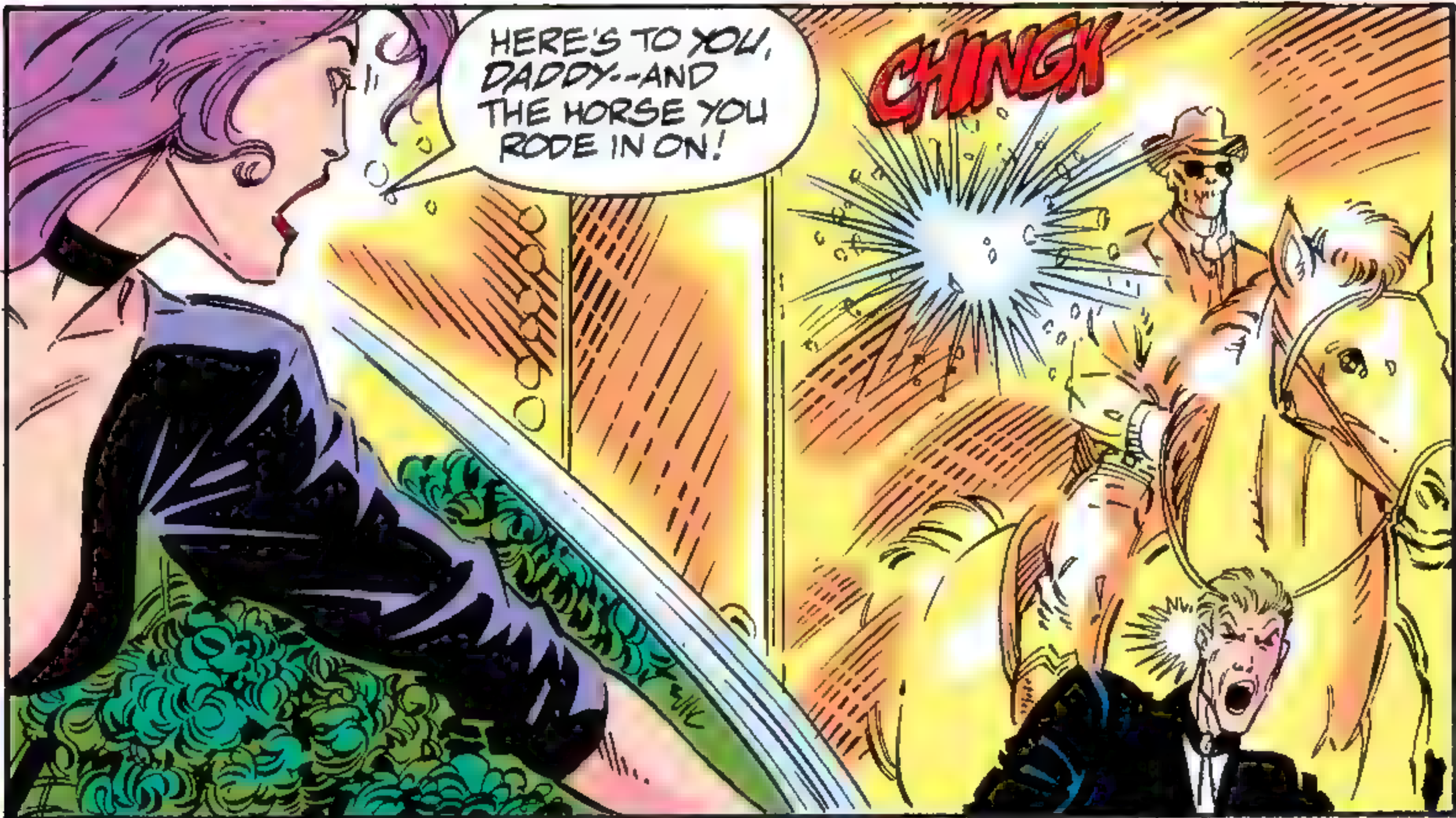
QUITE A TURNOUT.
EVERYONE'S
HERE. THE SYNDICATE
BOSSSES. THE HIGH
ROLLERS. THE
HEADLINERS.

A SORRY
COLLECTION
OF HYPO-
CRITES.
PAYING THEIR
RESPECTS TO
A MAN THEY
HATED.



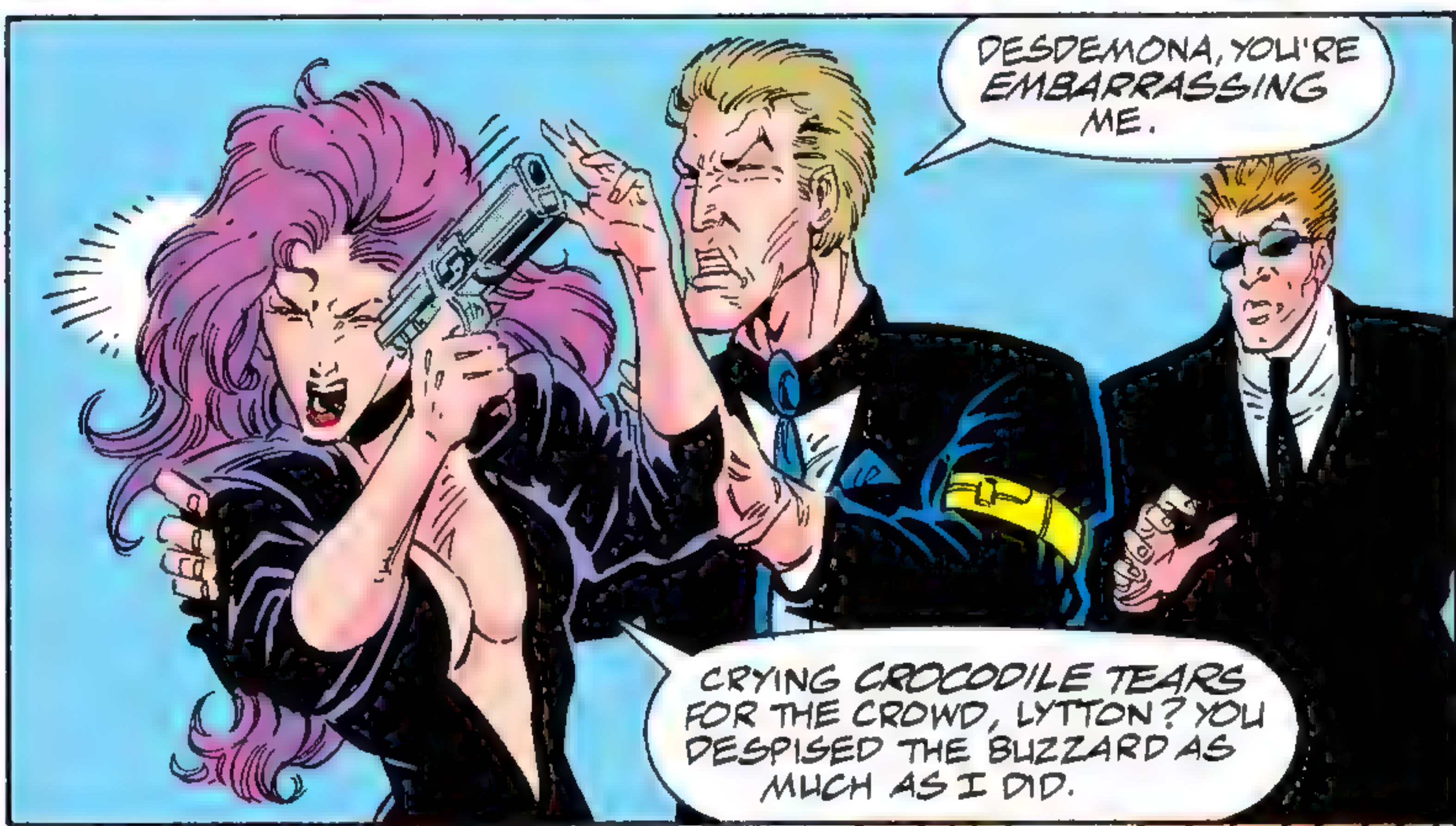
HERE'S TO YOU,
DADDY--AND
THE HORSE YOU
RODE IN ON!

CHING



DESDEMONA, YOU'RE
EMBARRASSING
ME.

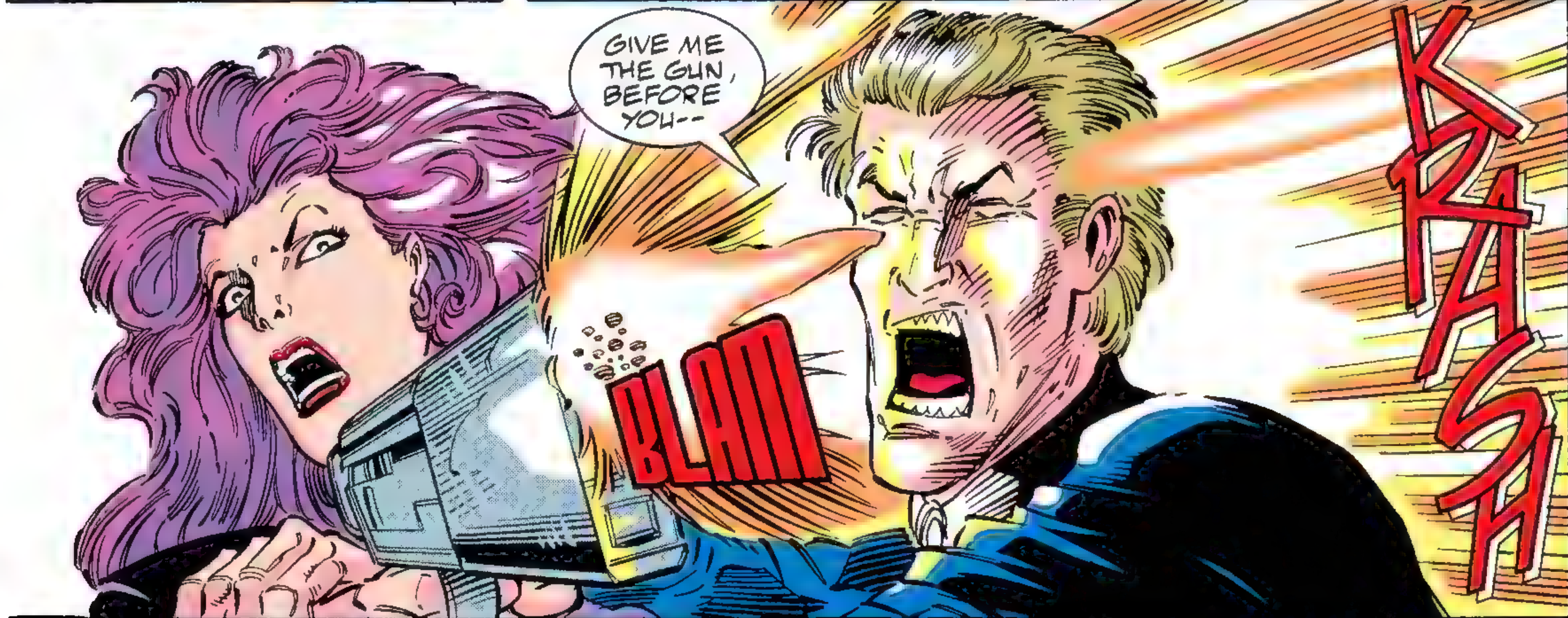
CRYING CROCODILE TEARS
FOR THE CROWD, LYTTON? YOU
DESPISED THE BUZZARD AS
MUCH AS I DID.



GIVE ME
THE GUN,
BEFORE
YOU--

BLAM

KRAASH



FACE IT,
BROTHER, DADDY'S
DEAD AND YOU
CAN'T STOP ME
FROM DANCING
ON HIS GRAVE.



ELSE-WHERE...

YOU'LL BE SAFE HERE TONIGHT--

--BUT I SUGGEST YOU DON'T OVERSTAY YOUR WELCOME.

WHAT A SOCIAL BUTTERFLY HE COULDN'T WAIT TO LEAVE US.

BE GLAD HE DECIDED TO HELP US AT ALL, TINA. WITHOUT XI'AN AND JUNKPILE, WE'RE EXTREMELY VULNERABLE.

AS ALWAYS, THE RULING CLASS TURNS AGAINST MUTANT.

WE SHOULD HAVE SEEN IT COMING. JUNKPILE NEVER WANTED ANY PART OF XI'AN'S DREAM.

EVEN WITH OUR DIFFERENCES, I DIDN'T THINK HE'D SELL US OUT.

BACKSTABBING SQUID.

REALITY CHECK, PEOPLE--

THAT SCRAP METAL MONSTROSITY'S THE LEAST OF OUR WORRIES.

WE HAVE SYNDICATE ENFORCERS ON OUR TAIL. THOSE GUYS ARE PROFESSIONALS.

THEN LET'S TAKE THE FIGHT TO THEM.

I'VE SPENT TOO MUCH OF MY LIFE ON THE DODGE, SIDE-STEPPING SLEAZE SCAVENGERS AND PUBLIC EYESORES.

IF SOMEONE'S SET US UP FOR A FALL, I SAY WE FIND THE GUILTY PARTY AND DO SOME DAMAGE.

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABES.

EVERYONE. COME QUICKLY. IT'S XI'AN.



GOOD LORD!

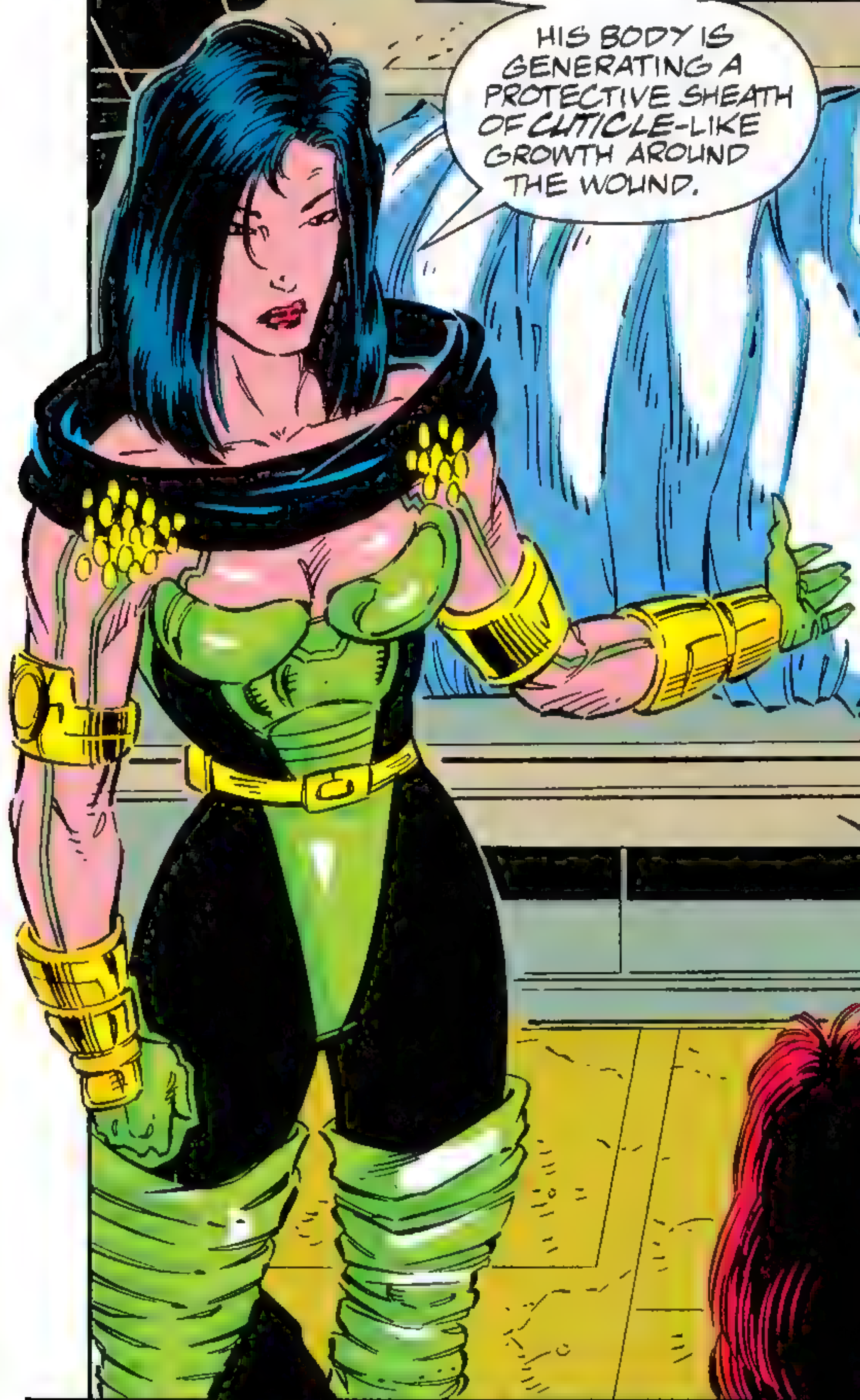
...NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THAT...

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO HIM, SHAKTI?

THE ASSASSIN'S PLASMA BLAST CAUSED EXTENSIVE UPPER THORACIC INJURY--

THE SHOCK TO HIS SYSTEM HAS TRIGGERED AN UNEXPECTED FACET OF XI'AN'S MUTANT BIOLOGY.

HIS BODY IS GENERATING A PROTECTIVE SHEATH OF CUTICLE-LIKE GROWTH AROUND THE WOUND.



DO YOU THINK IT'S CANCEROUS?

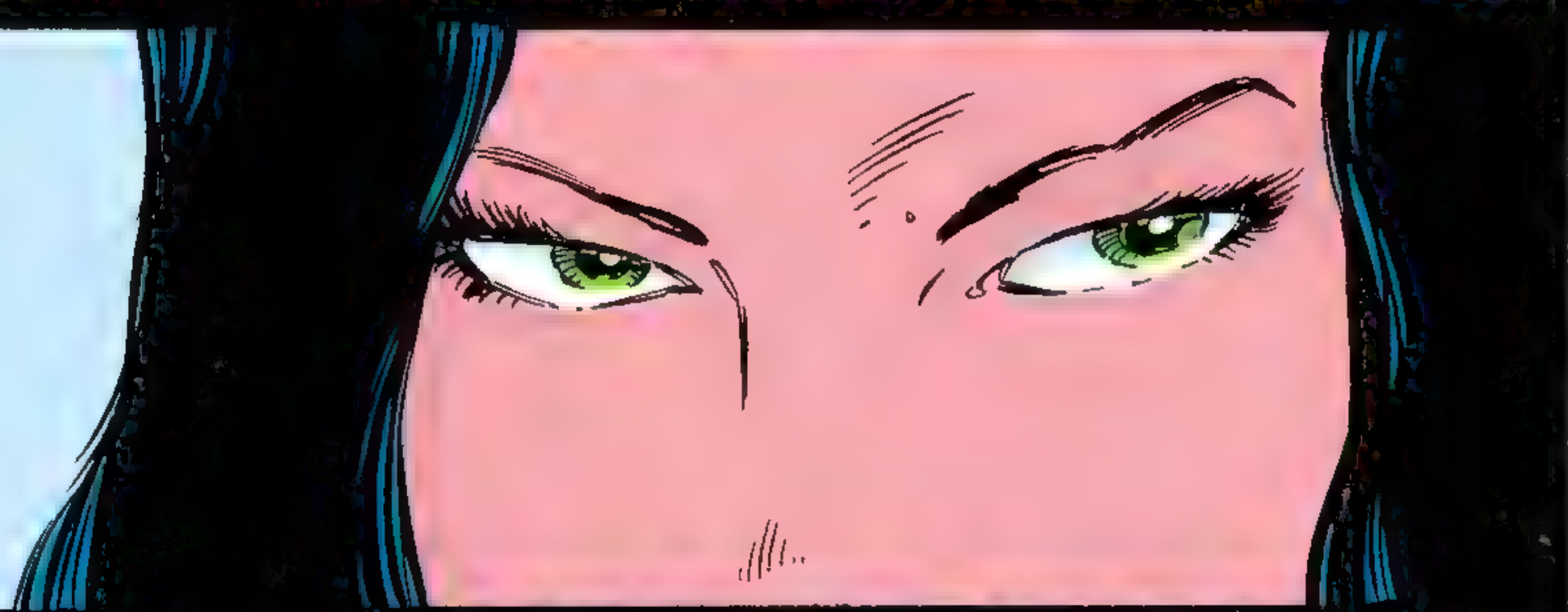
POSSIBLY. IT'S SPREADING MUCH FASTER THAN ANY CANCER I'VE SEEN--

BUT WITHOUT A GENUINE MEDICAL LAB, I CAN ONLY HYPOTHEZIZE.

SO WHAT CAN WE DO?

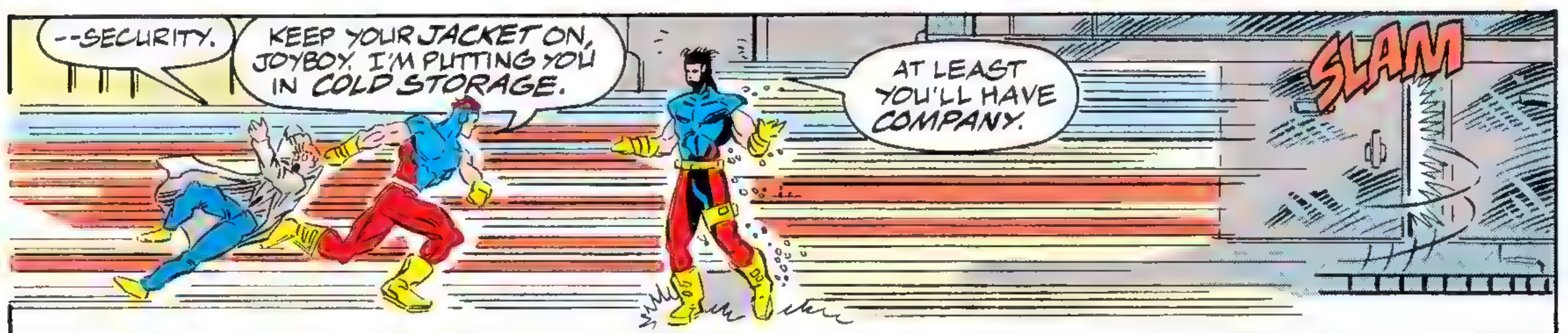
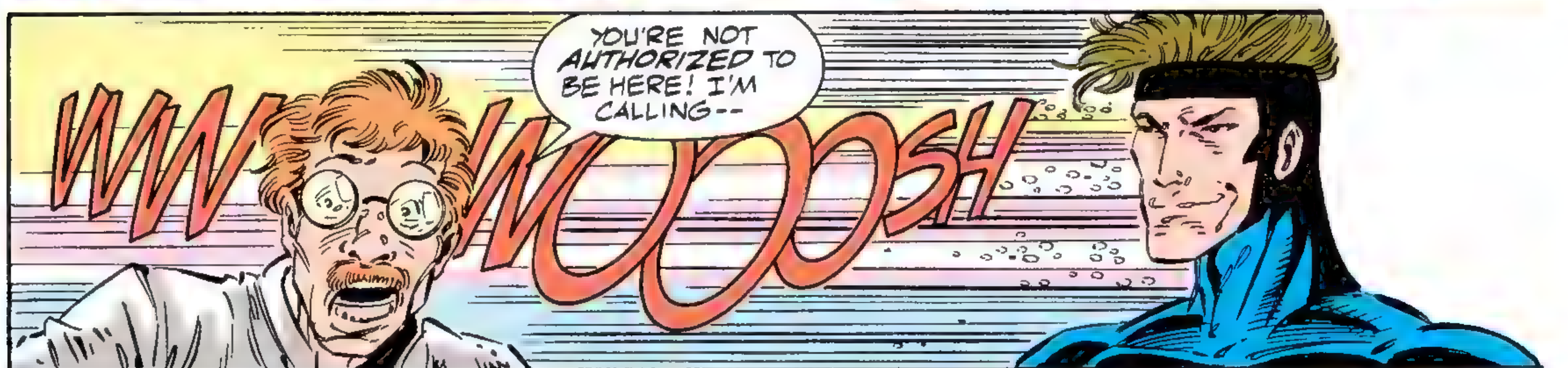
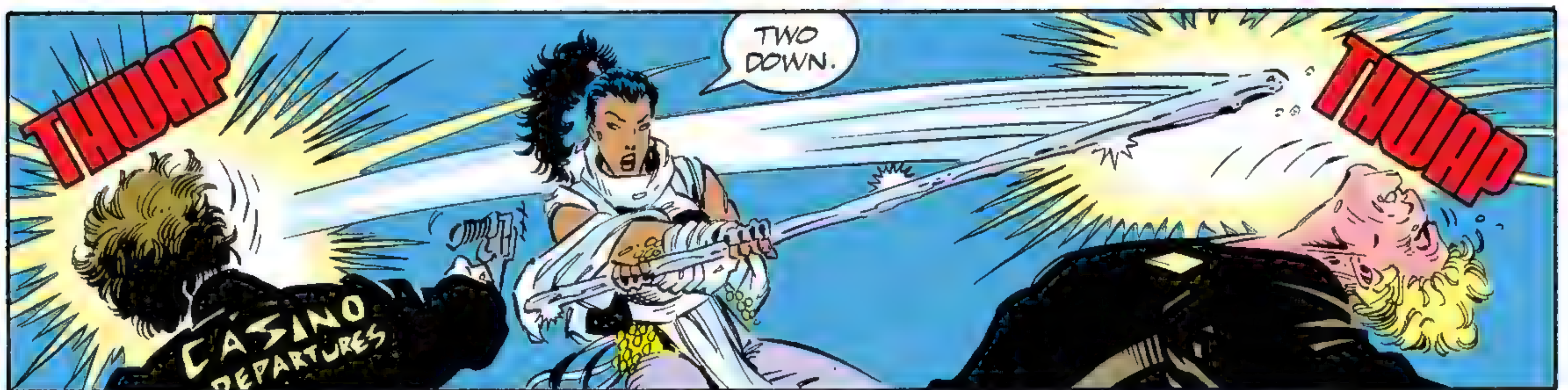
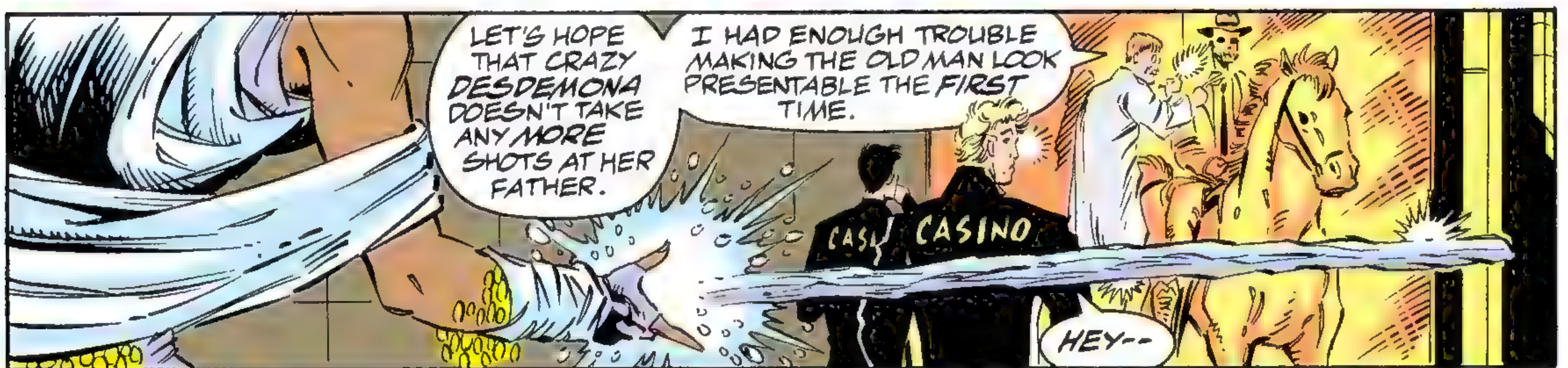
TINA WAS RIGHT. WE NEED HARD EVIDENCE XI'AN DIDN'T KILL NOAH SYNGE--IF ONLY TO GET THE ENFORCERS OFF OUR BACK.

I CAN'T HELP XI'AN IF WE'RE UNDER FIRE.



LATER.

Retinal Pattern
Verified. Employee
CLX-44411W:
Cole, Wesley Alan



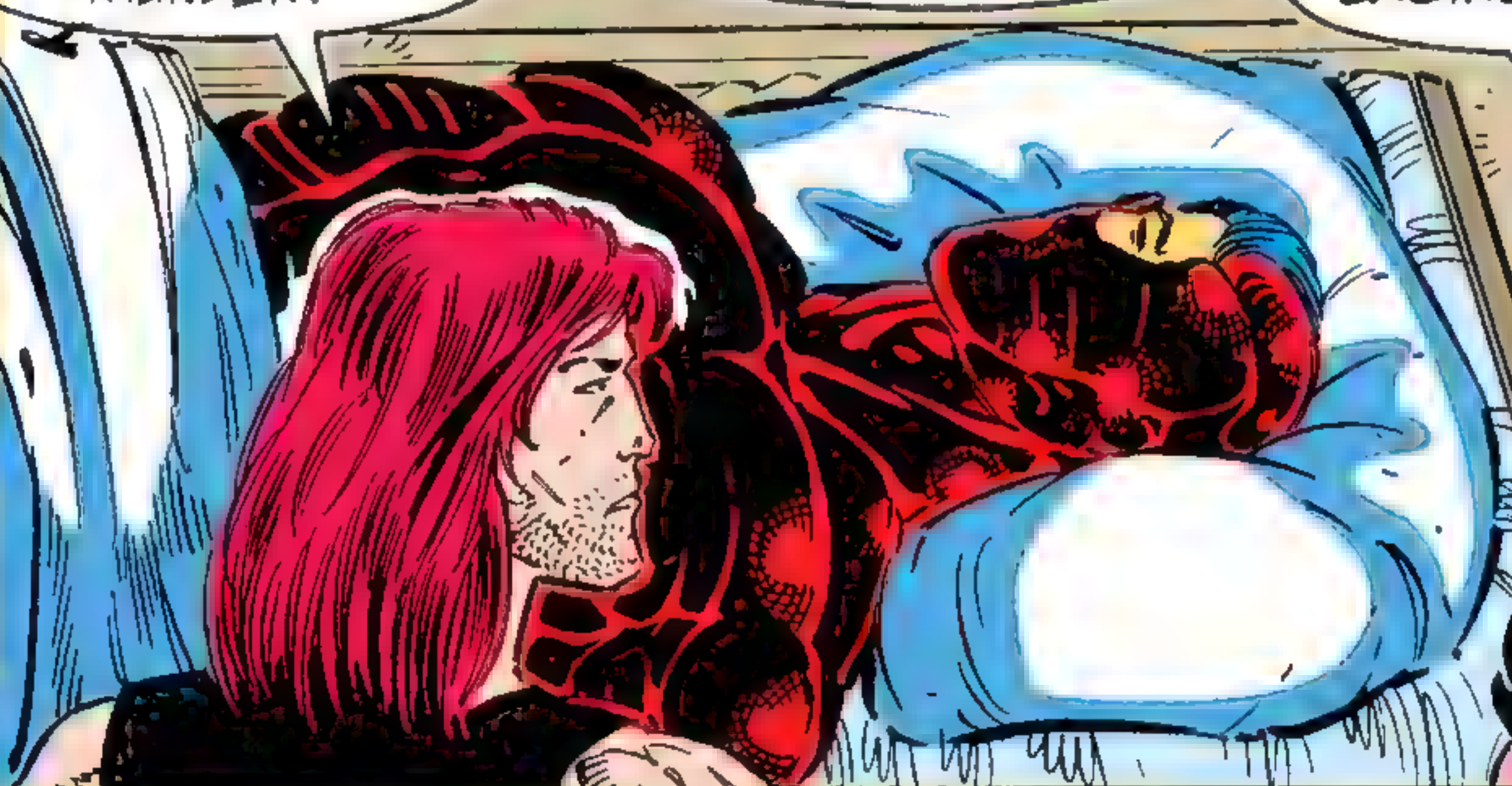
HISTORY SHOWS US THAT
MUTANTS HAVE OFTEN
BEEN MADE THE **SCAPE-
GOATS** OF TYRANTS.



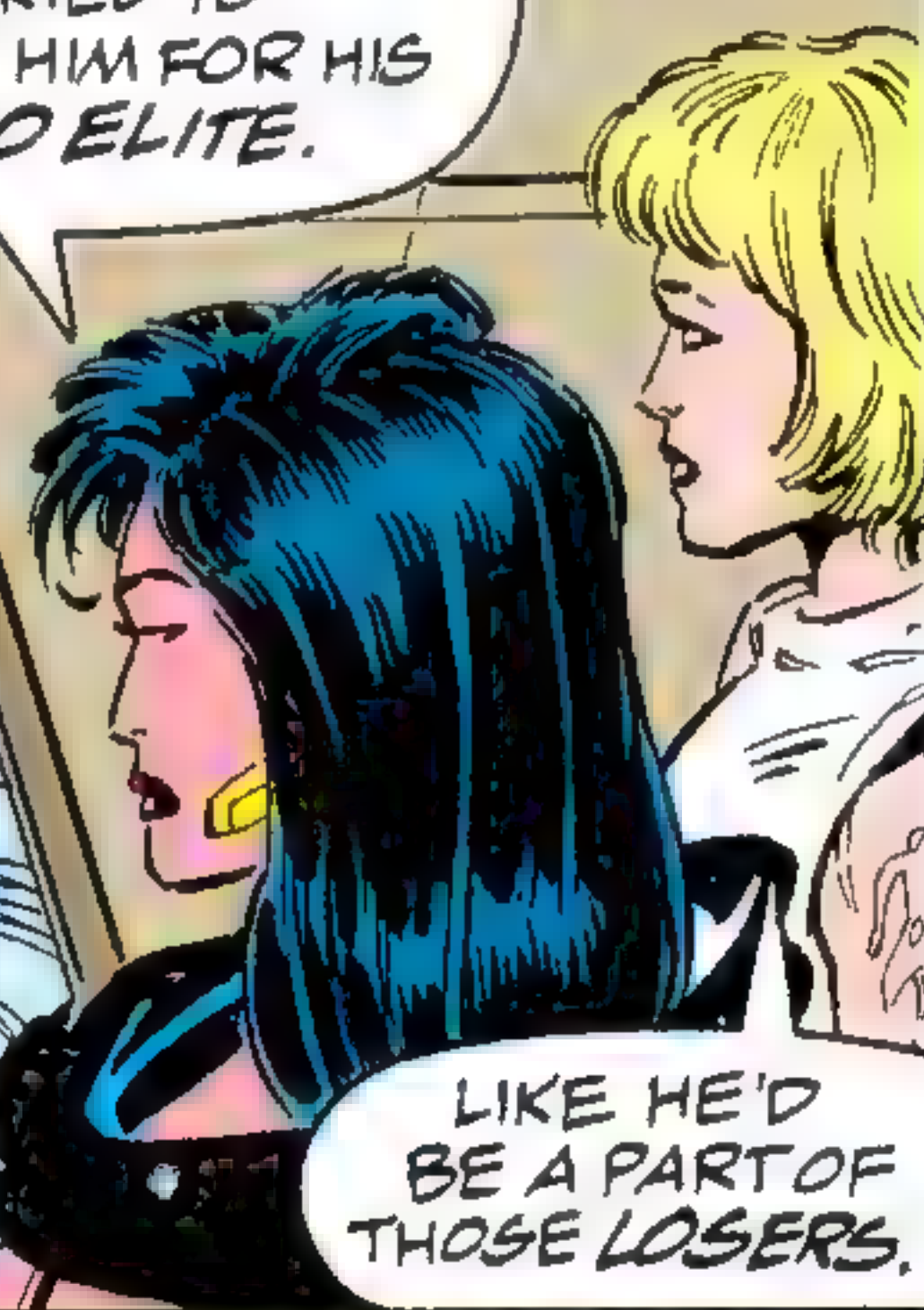
THAT STILL DOESN'T
EXPLAIN WHY THE
CASINO BLAMES
XI'AN FOR SYNGE'S
MURDER.

THE ENMITY BETWEEN
XI'AN AND NOAH SYNGE
WAS LONG STANDING
AND WELL KNOWN.

WHEN XI'AN RODE
WITH THE LAWLESS,
SYNGE TRIED TO
RECRUIT HIM FOR HIS
CASINO ELITE.

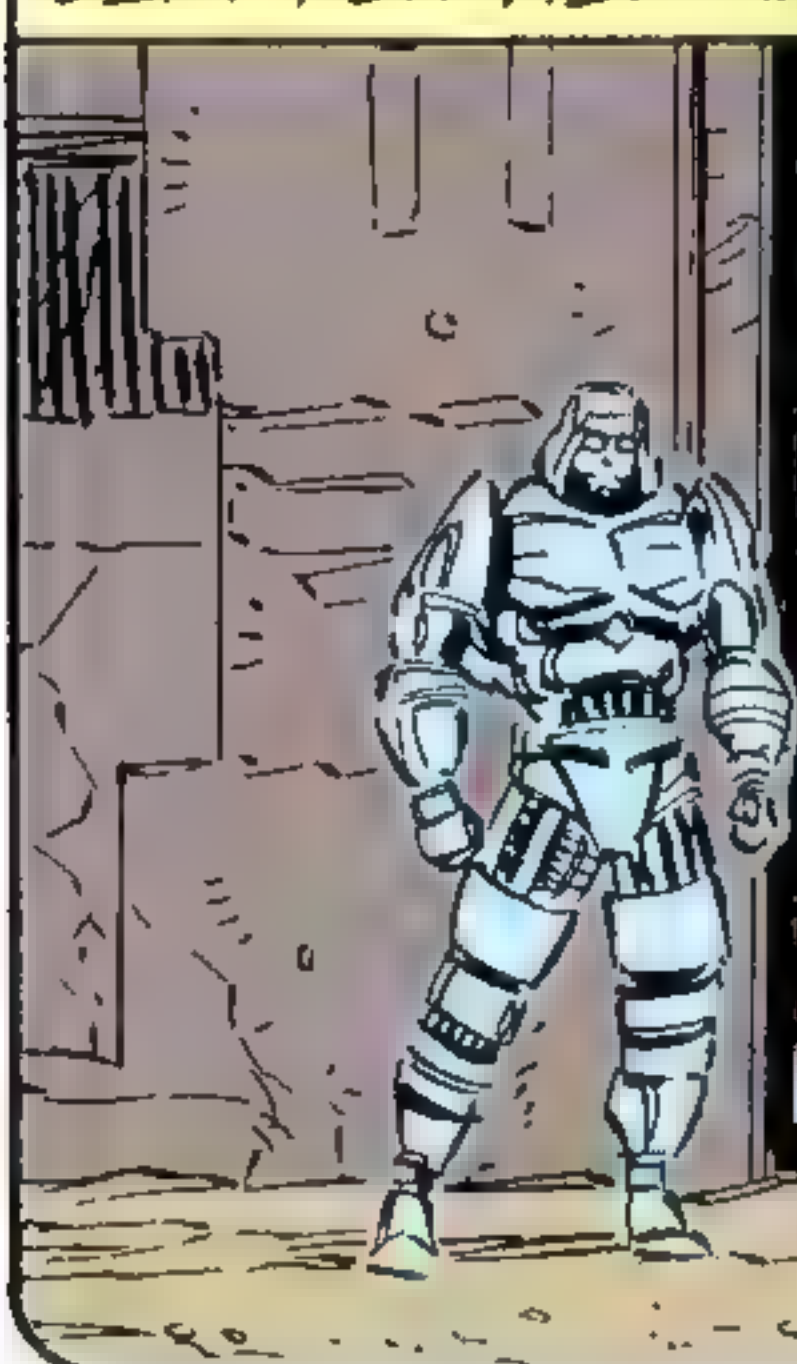


LIKE HE'D
BE A PART OF
THOSE LOSERS.



"XI'AN'S REFUSAL ANGERED THE OLD MAN, AND
ENFORCER PRESSURE WAS ONE REASON XI'AN
LEFT FOR VIETNAM.

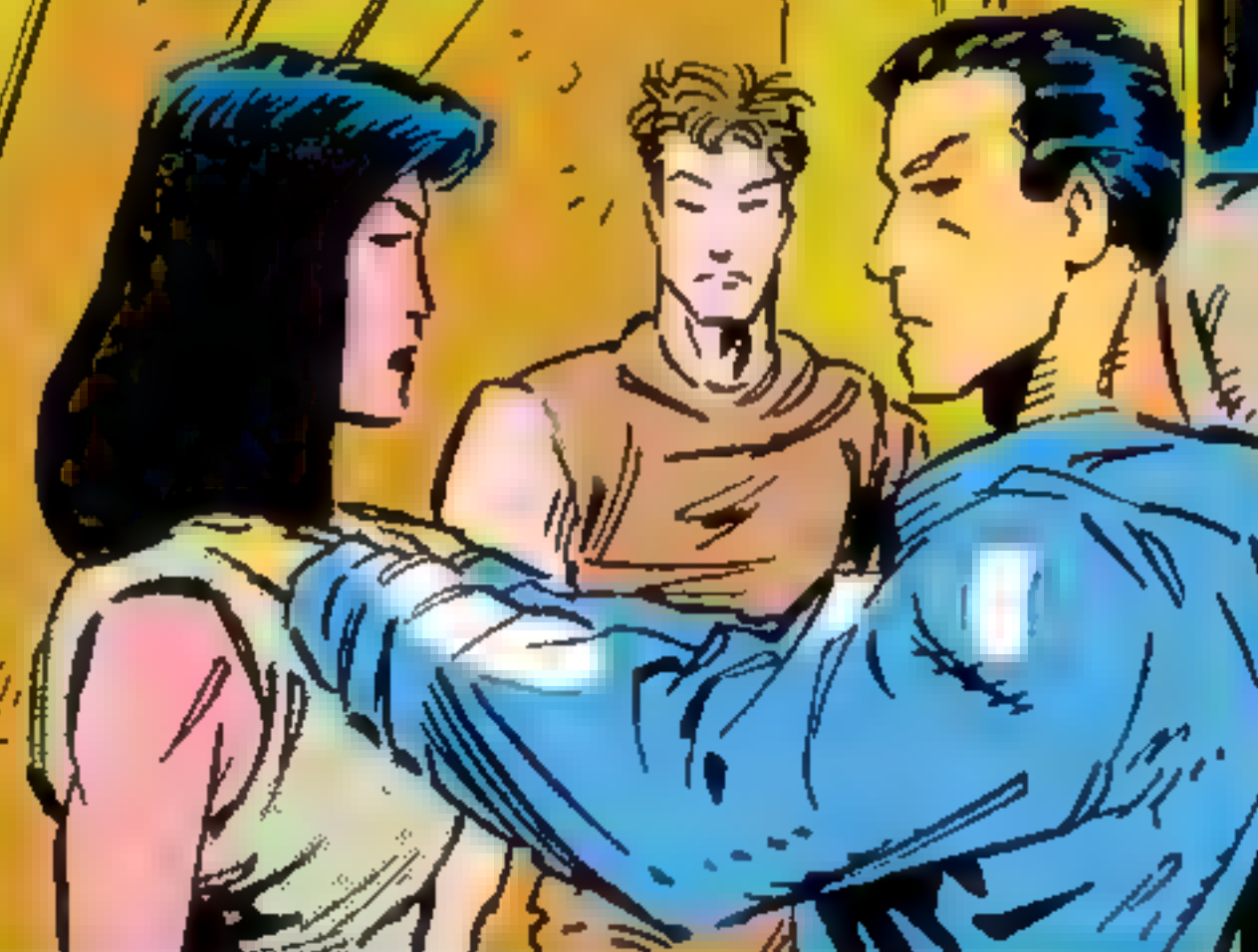
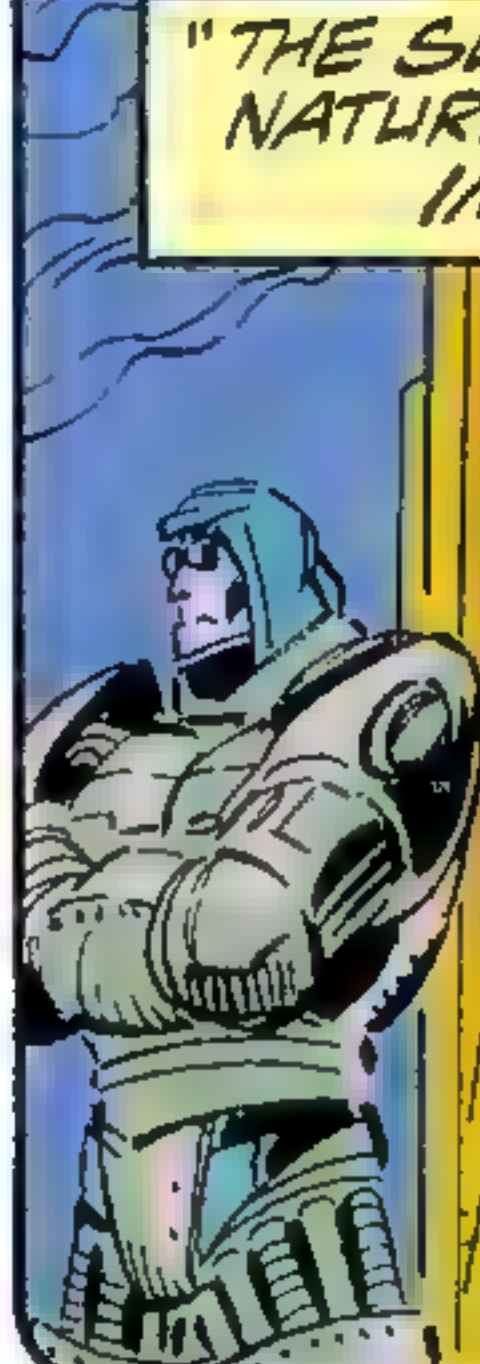
"HE RETURNED FROM
SAIGON WITH A NEWFOUND
CONSCIENCE AND A VISION
OF A POST-CORPORATE
WORLD ORDER.



"NOW HE HAD
REAL
REASON TO
OPPOSE
SYNGE
AND THE
SYNDICATE.

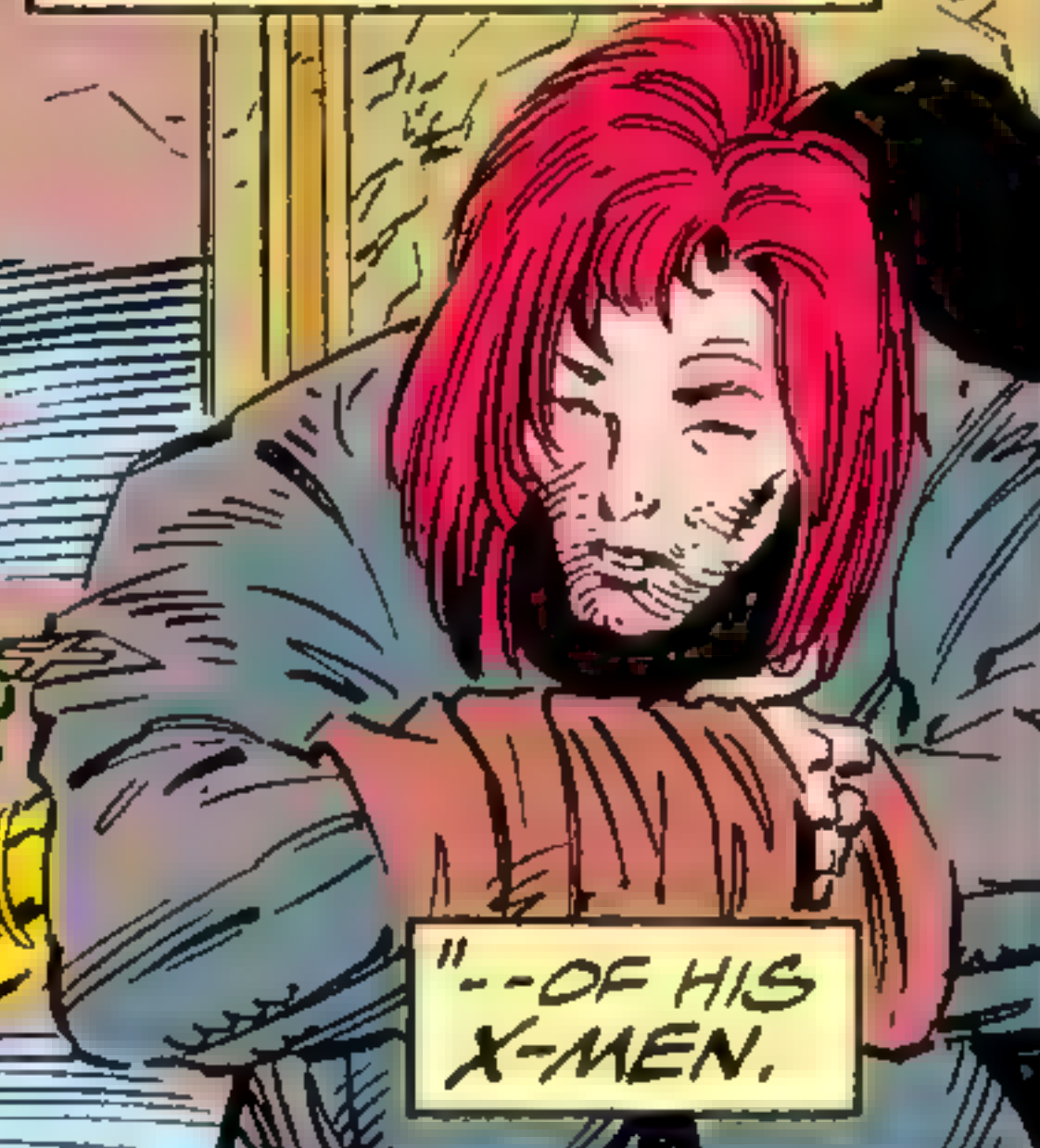
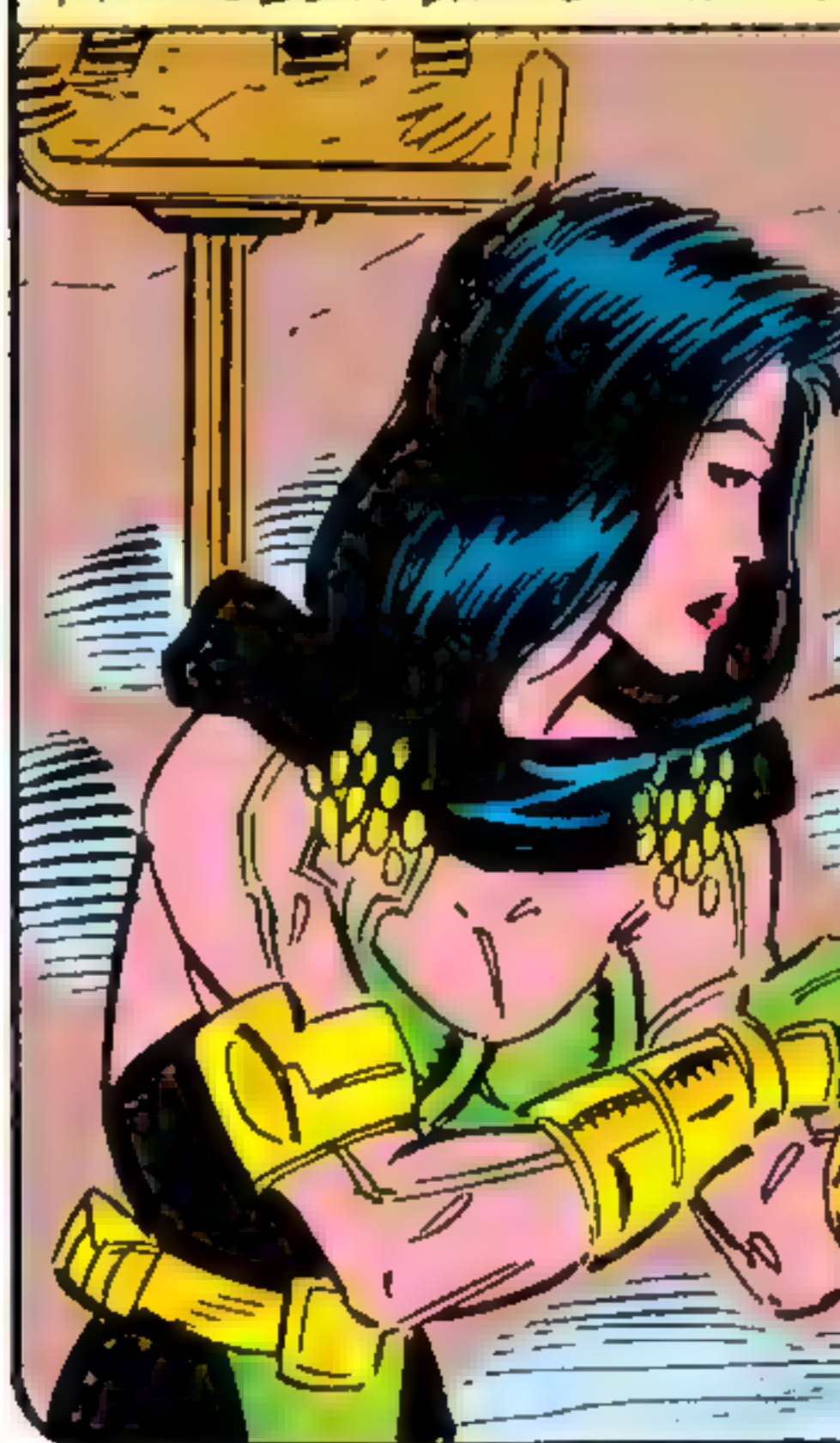
"KNOWING MY ABILITIES WOULD HELP HIM FIND OTHER
MUTANTS, HE CONVINCED ME TO LEAVE STARK/FUJIKAWA.

"THE SUBSTANCE OF HIS DREAM AND THE
NATURE OF HIS PASSION MADE HIM
IMPOSSIBLE TO REFUSE.



"WHEN I FOUND YOU ON THE STREET, THE GATHERINGS
HAD BEEN UNDERWAY FOR SIX MONTHS.

"XI'AN SAID YOU
WOULD BE THE FINAL
COMPONENT OF HIS
STRIKE FORCE--



"--OF HIS
X-MEN.

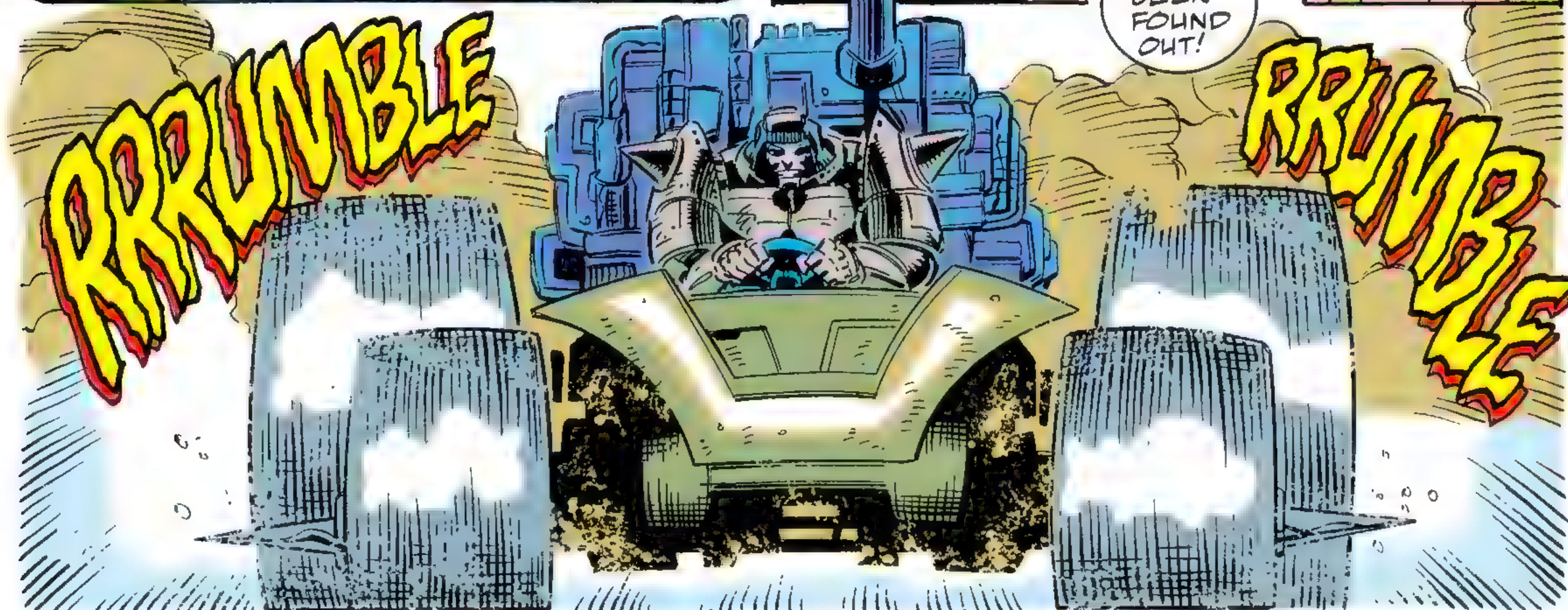
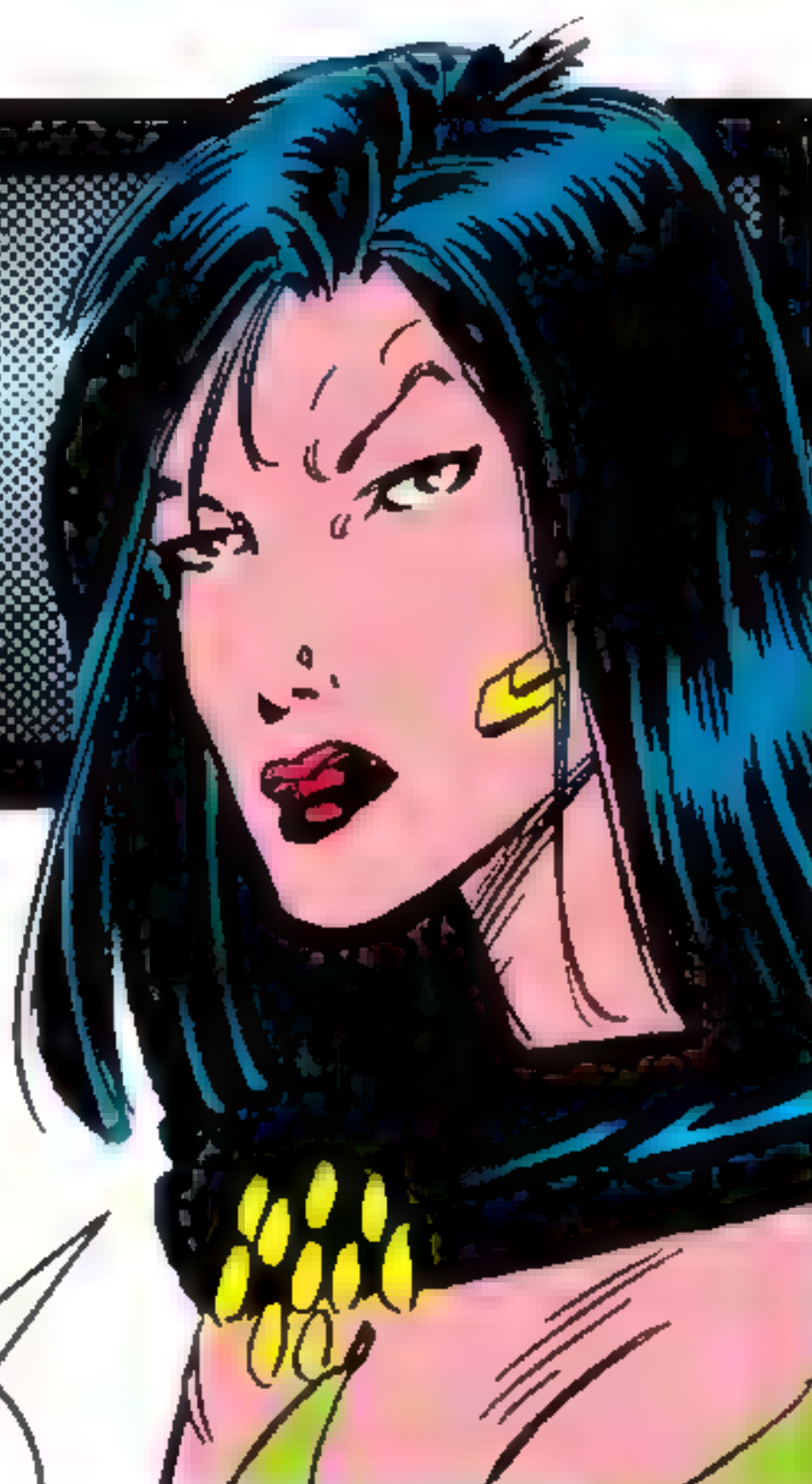
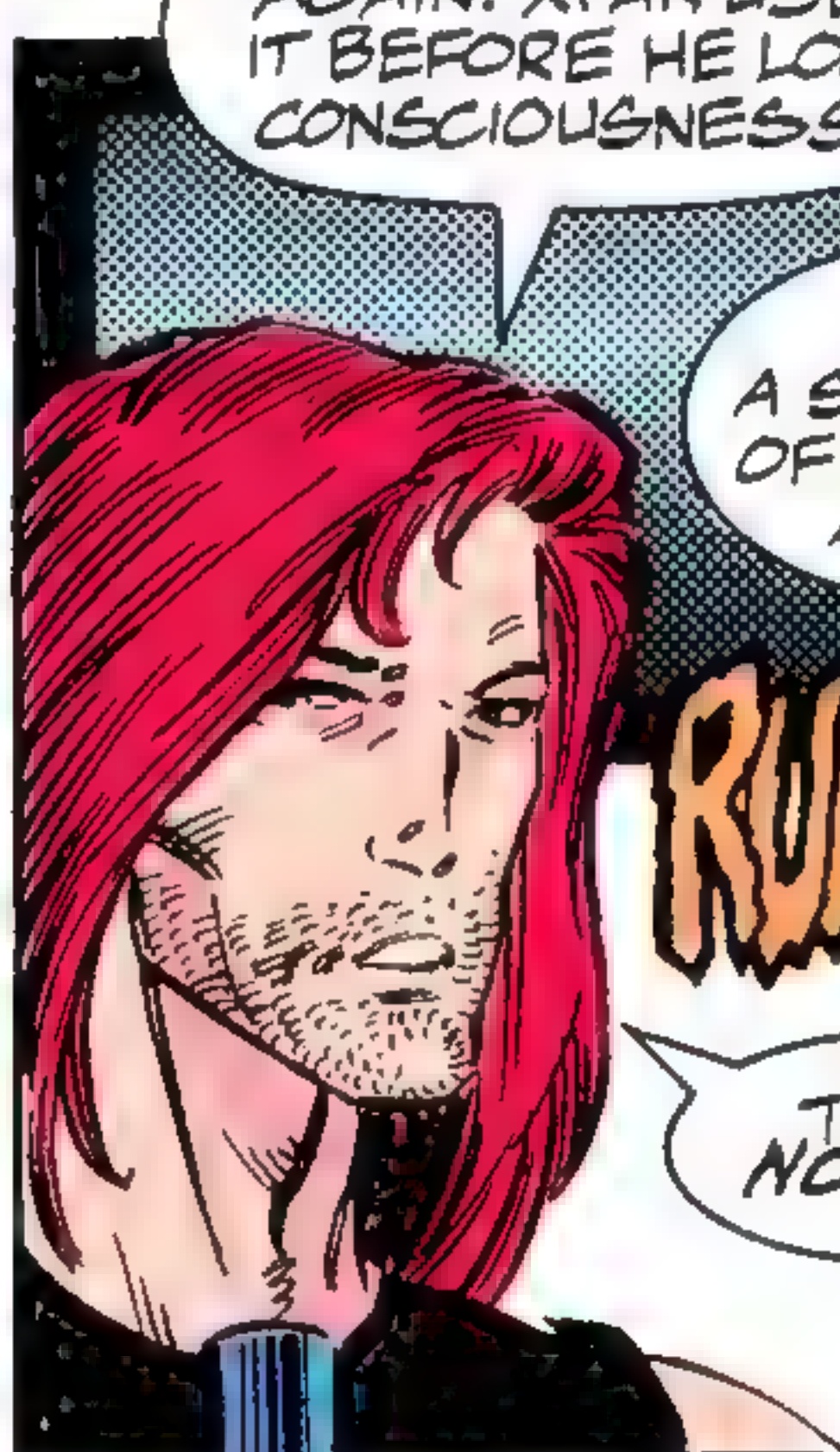
THAT PHRASE
AGAIN. XI'AN USED
IT BEFORE HE LOST
CONSCIOUSNESS.

IT IS
A SYMBOL
OF POWER
AND--

RUMBLE

THAT
NOISE--

WE'VE
BEEN
FOUND
OUT!



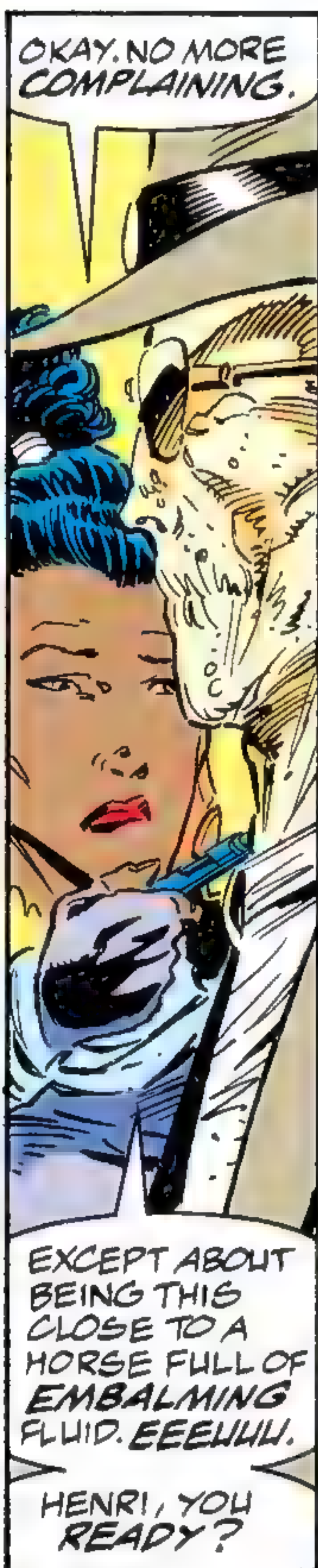


I FEEL LIKE A GRAVE ROBBER DOING THIS.

SYNGE STOLE MORE FROM THE PEOPLE THAN A MERE TISSUE SAMPLE.

HE ROBBED THEM OF THEIR FAMILIES, THEIR MONEY, THEIR LIVES.

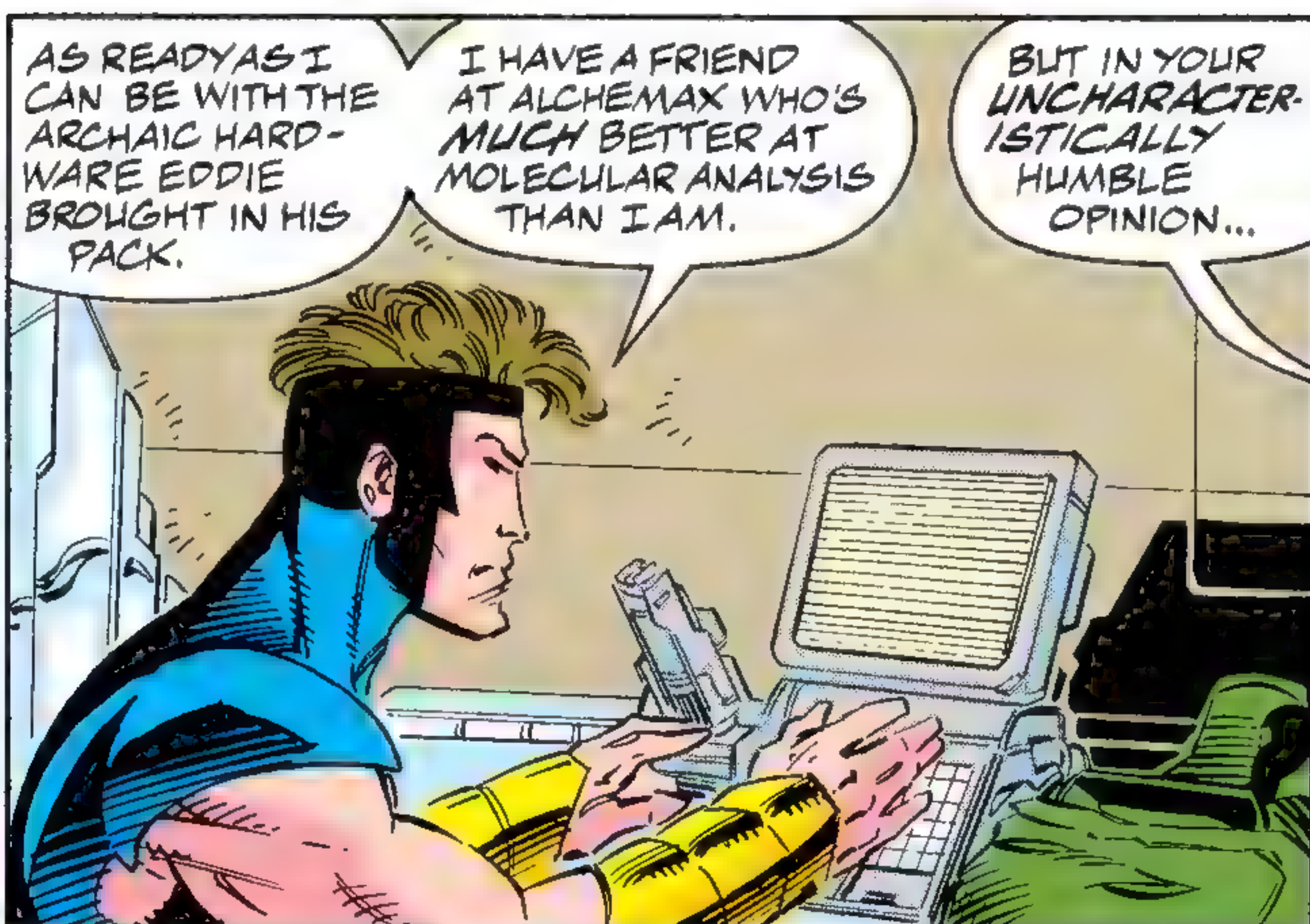
HE MADE SURE THE HOUSE ALWAYS TOOK ITS CUT.



OKAY. NO MORE COMPLAINING.

EXCEPT ABOUT BEING THIS CLOSE TO A HORSE FULL OF EMBALMING FLUID. EEEUUU.

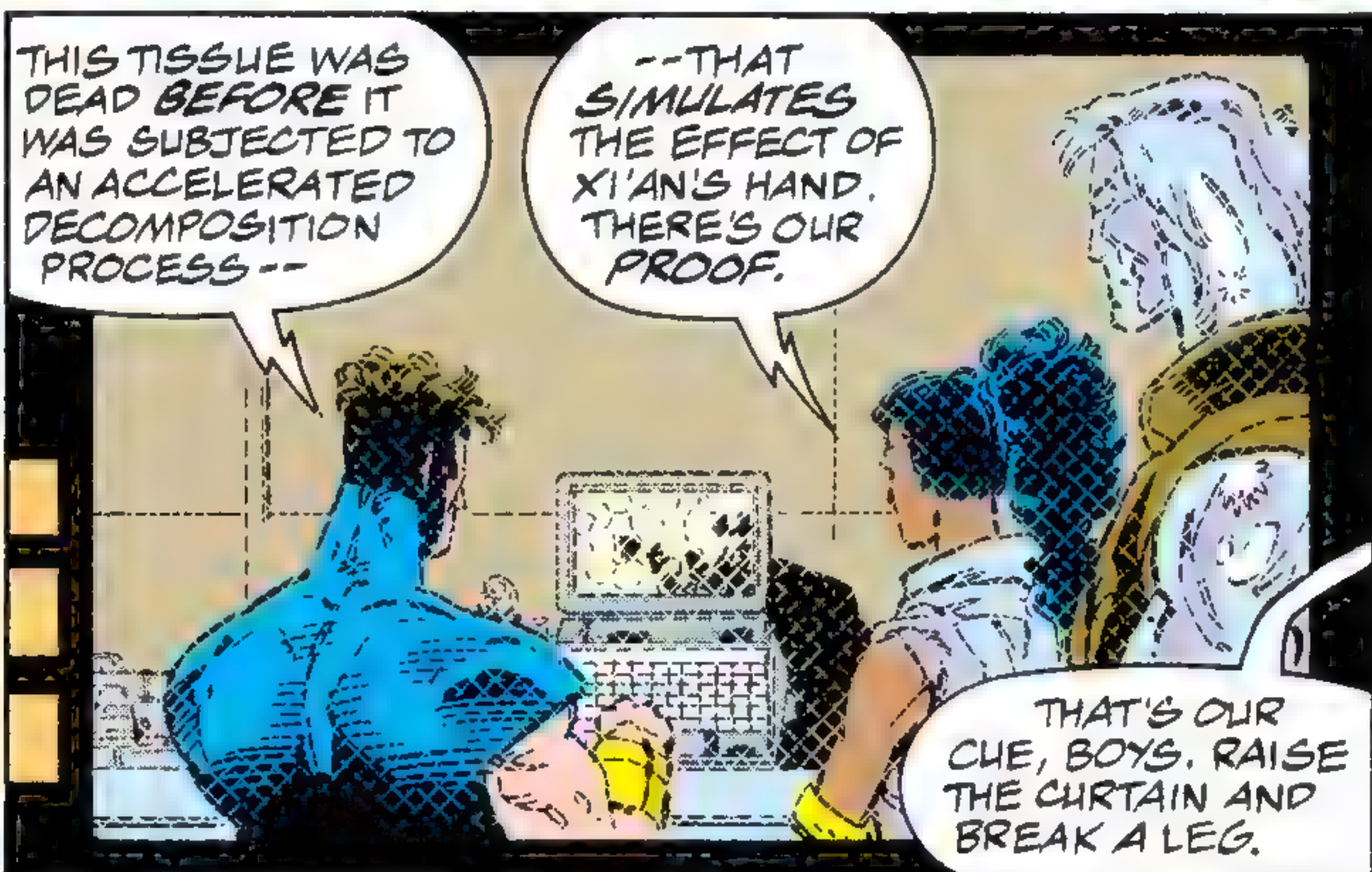
HENRI, YOU READY?



AS READY AS I CAN BE WITH THE ARCHAIC HARDWARE EDDIE BROUGHT IN HIS PACK.

I HAVE A FRIEND AT ALCHEMAX WHO'S MUCH BETTER AT MOLECULAR ANALYSIS THAN I AM.

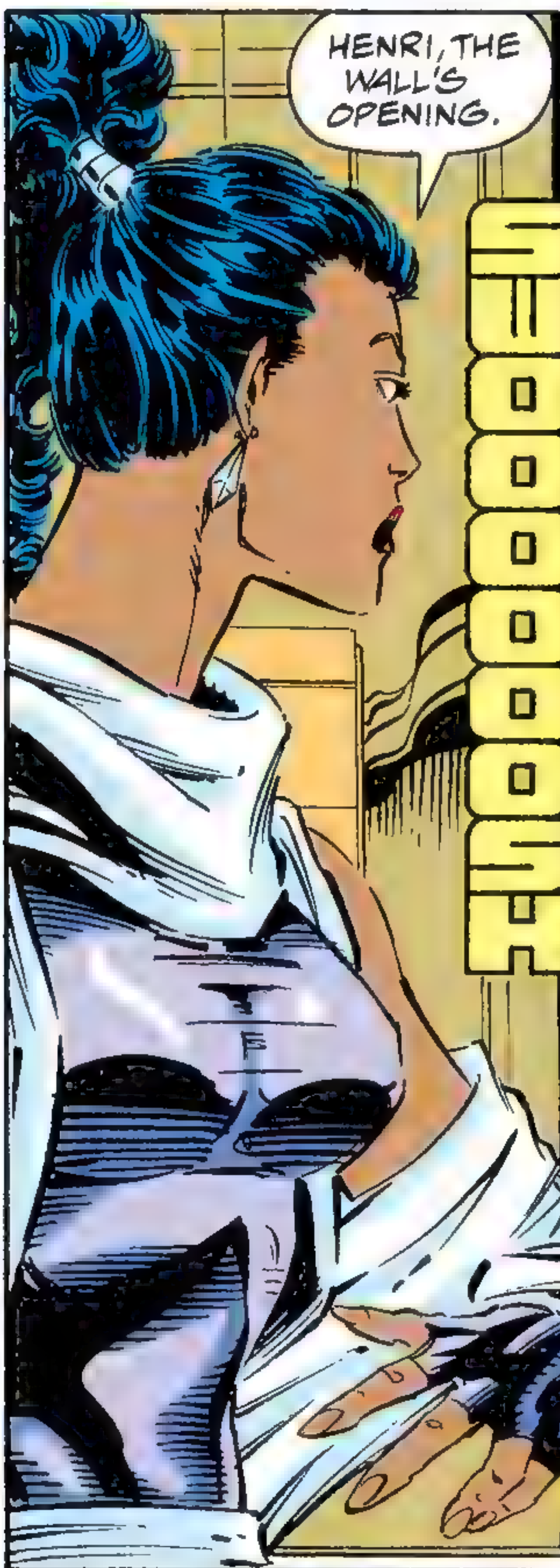
BUT IN YOUR UNCHARACTERISTICALLY HUMBLE OPINION...



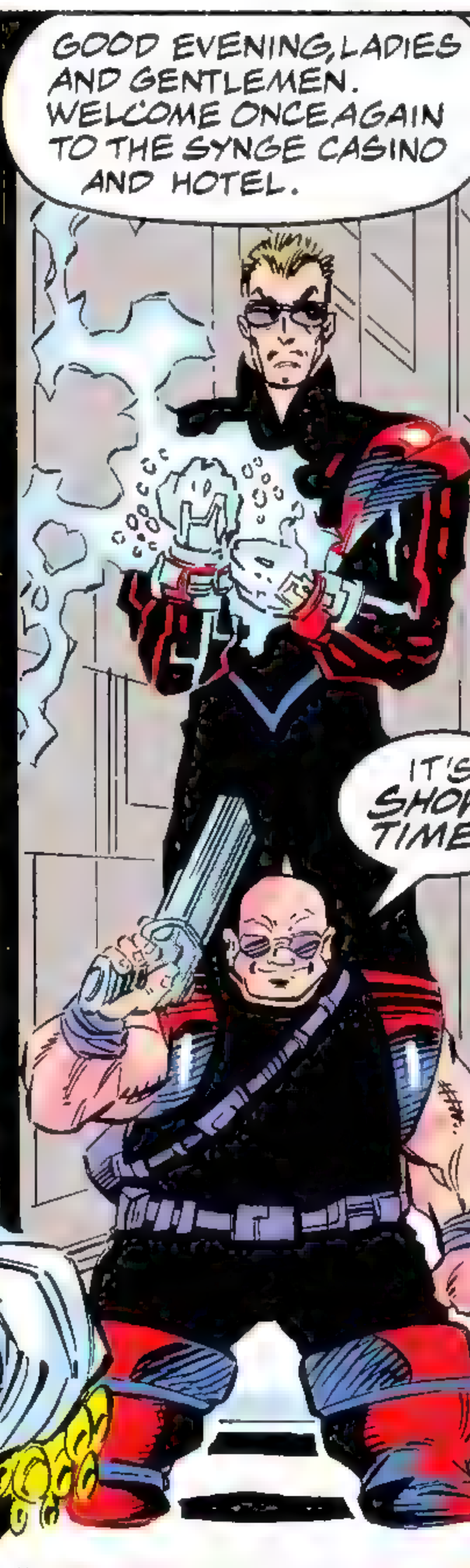
THIS TISSUE WAS DEAD BEFORE IT WAS SUBJECTED TO AN ACCELERATED DECOMPOSITION PROCESS --

--THAT SIMULATES THE EFFECT OF XI'AN'S HAND. THERE'S OUR PROOF.

THAT'S OUR CUE, BOYS. RAISE THE CURTAIN AND BREAK A LEG.

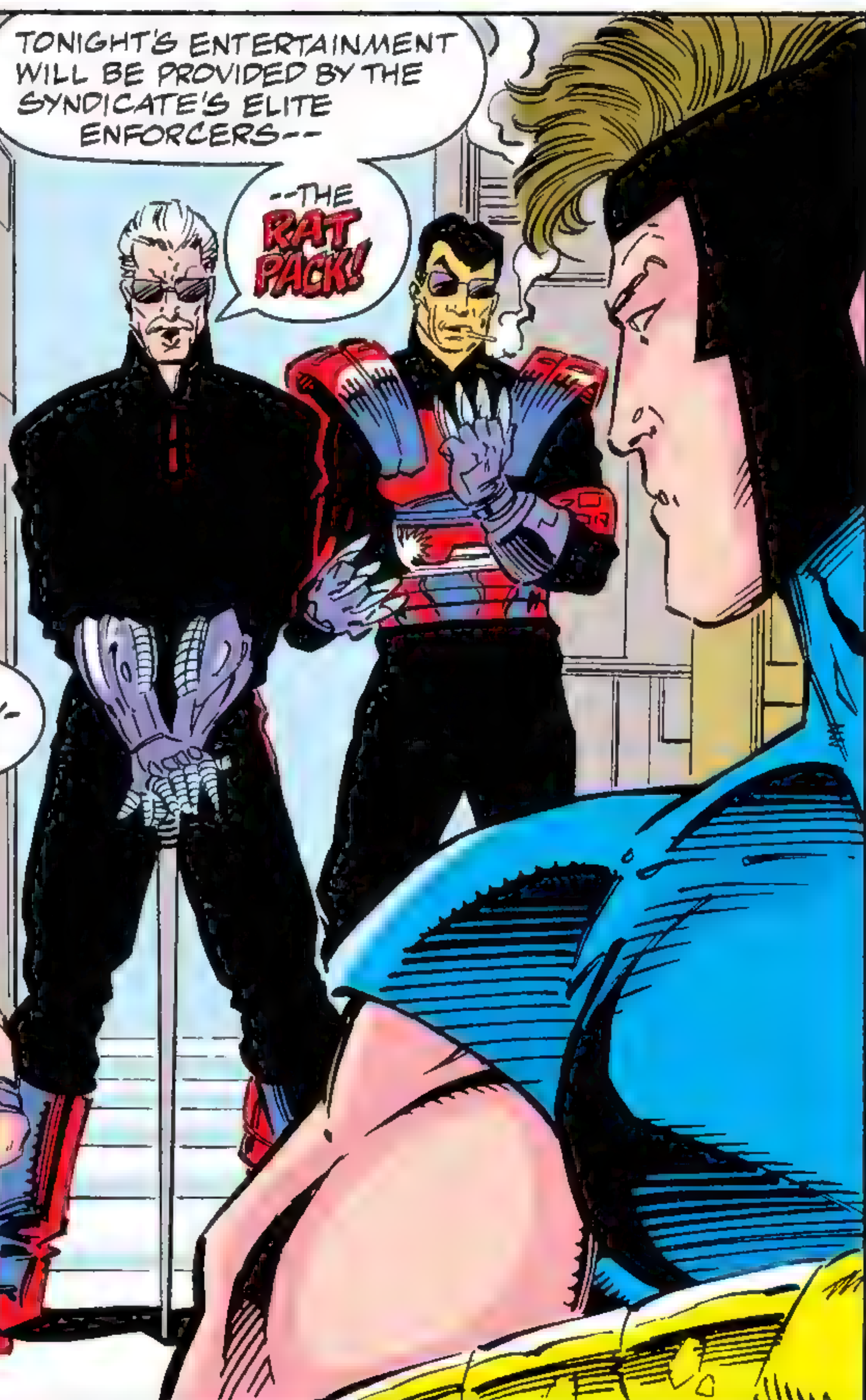


HENRI, THE WALL'S OPENING.



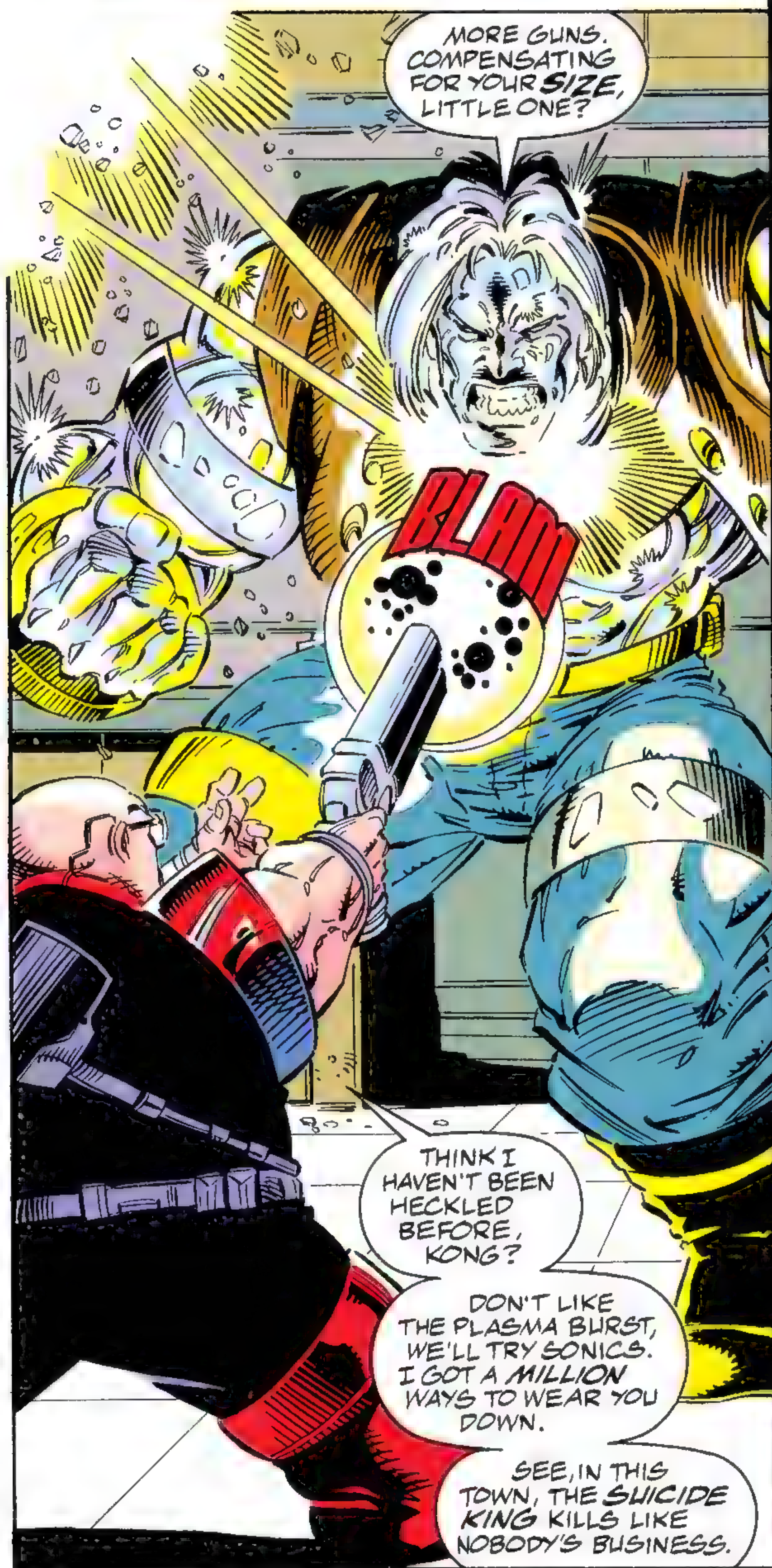
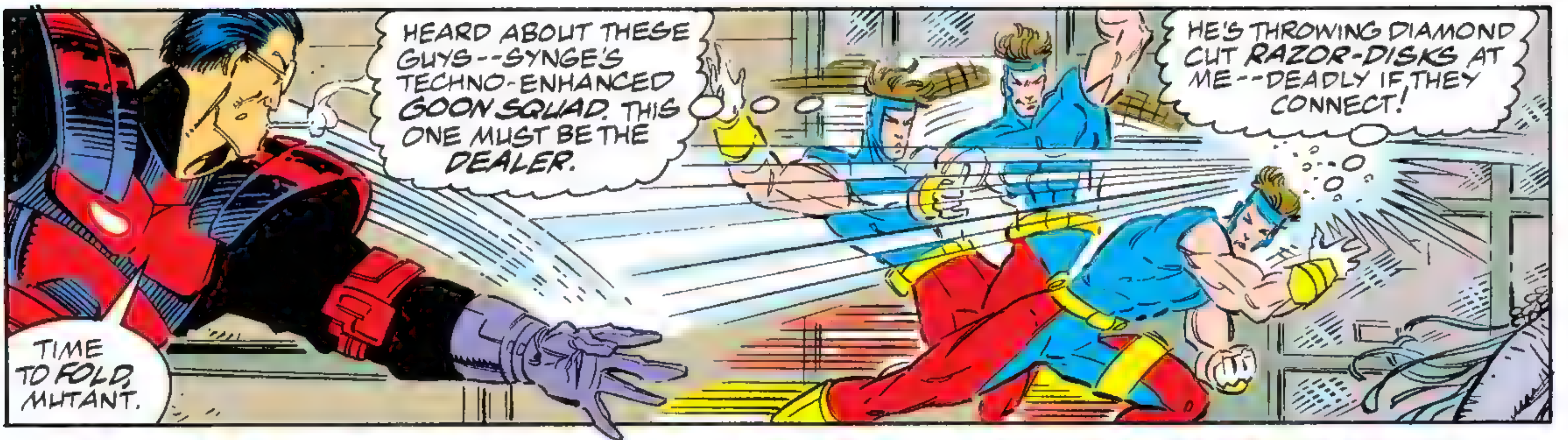
GOOD EVENING, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN. WELCOME ONCE AGAIN TO THE SYNGE CASINO AND HOTEL.

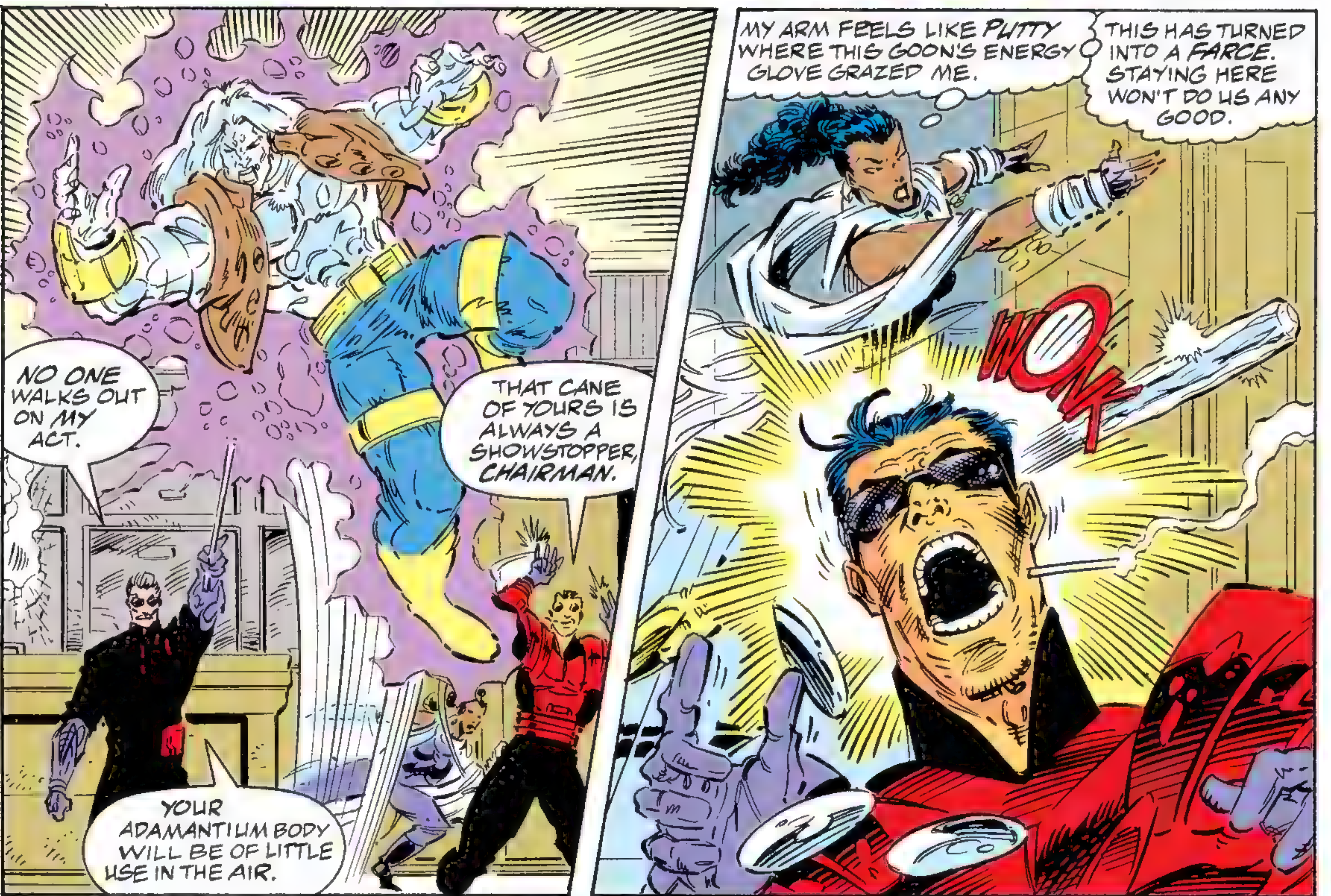
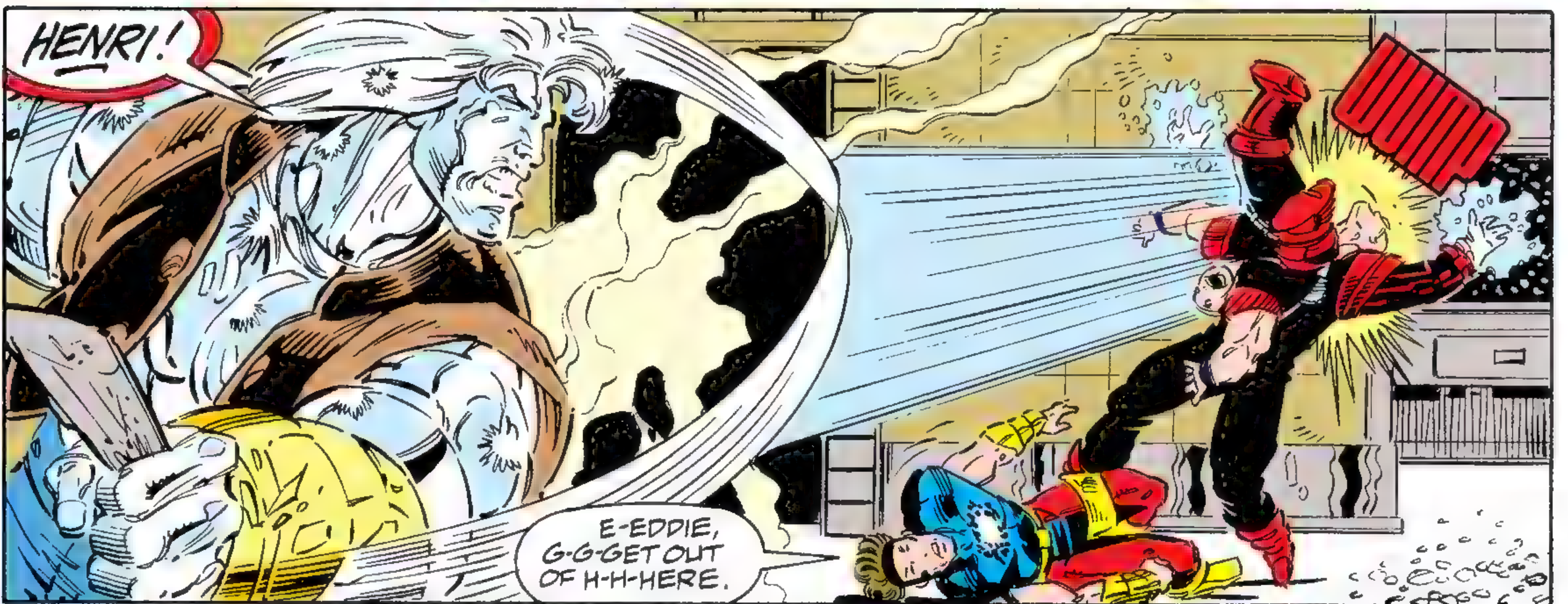
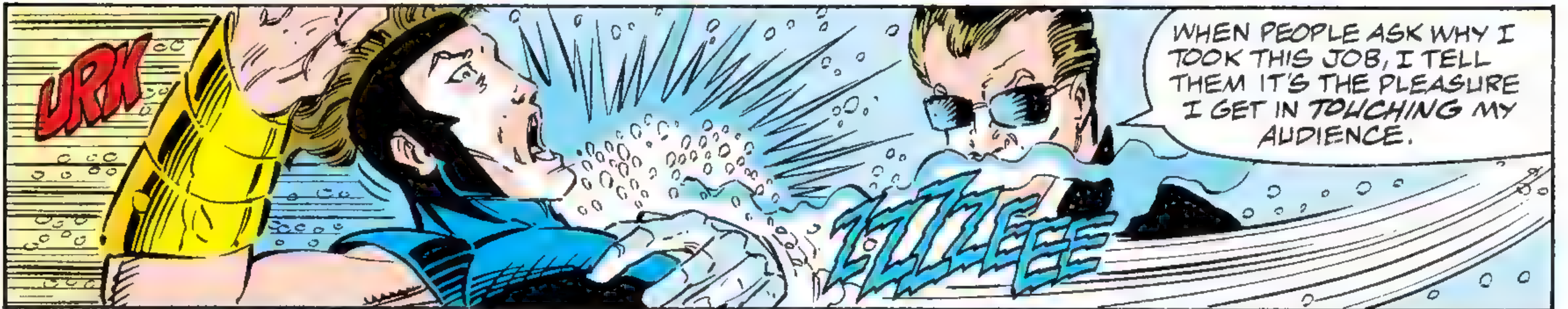
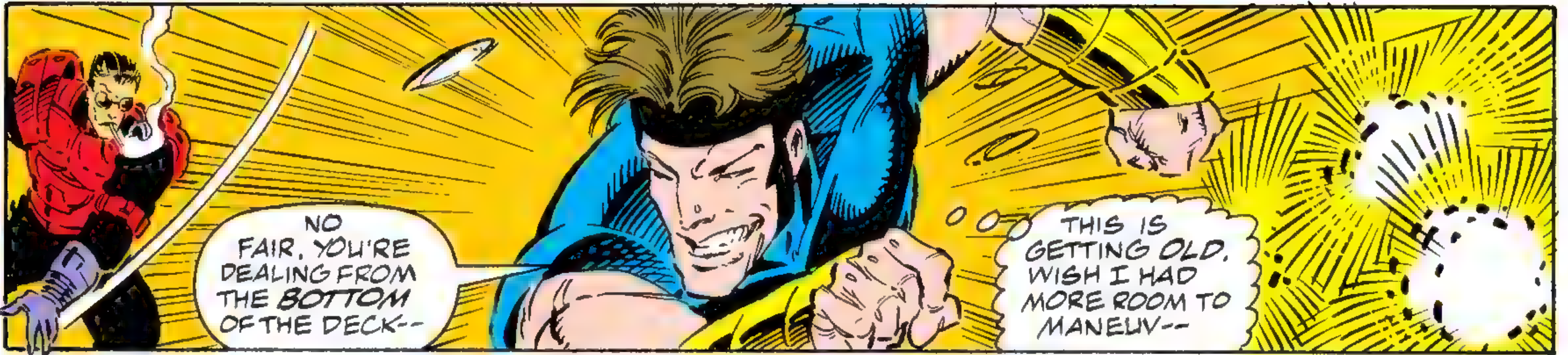
IT'S SHOW-TIME.

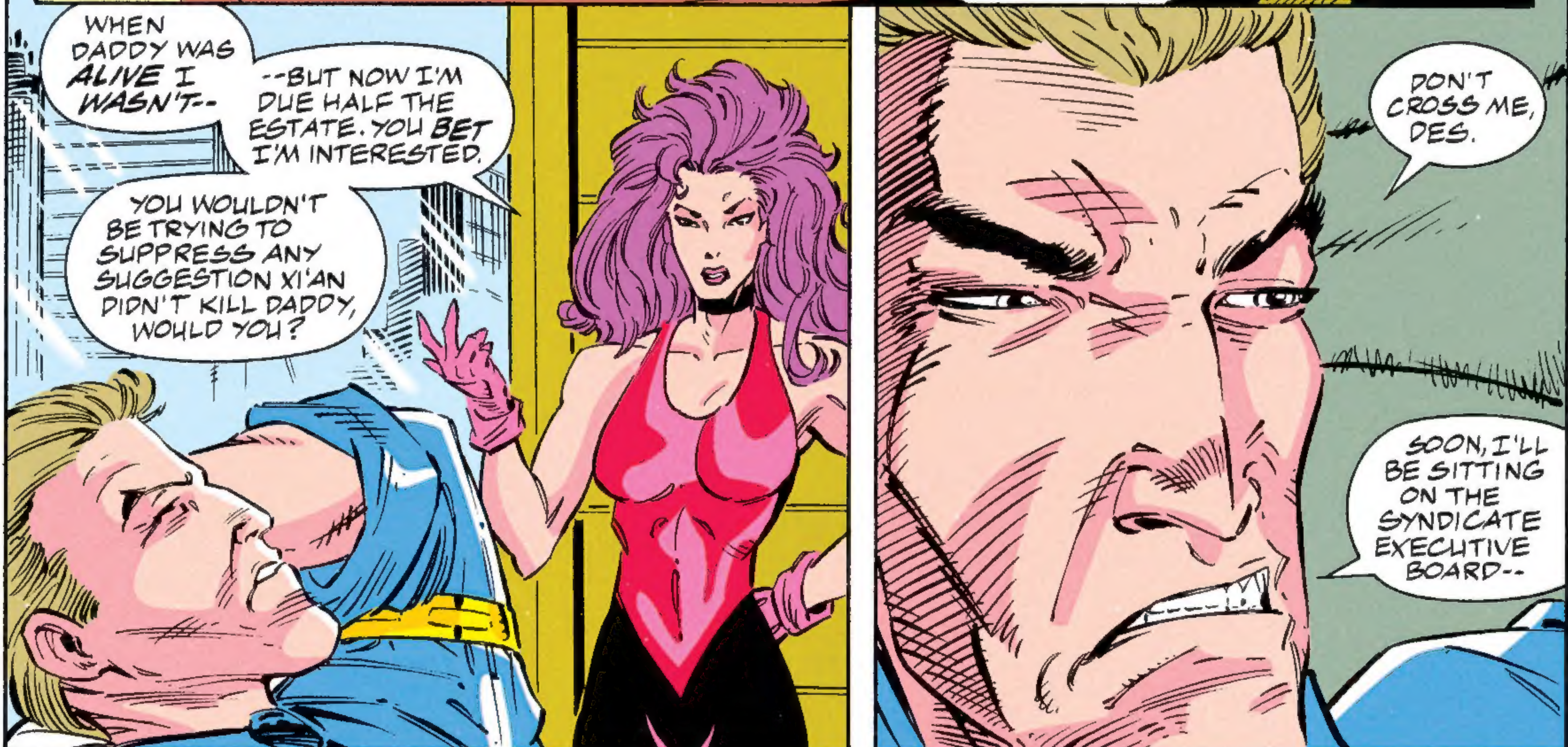
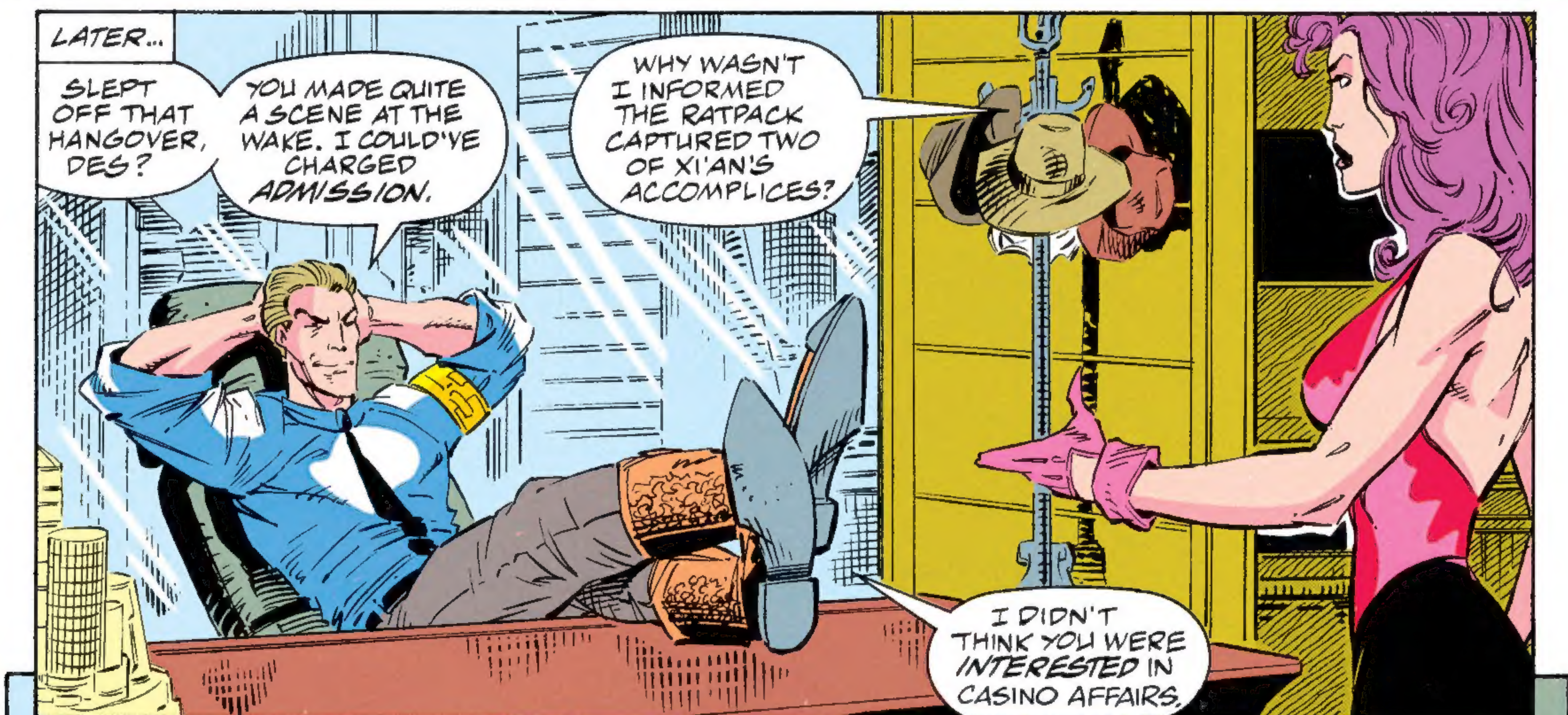
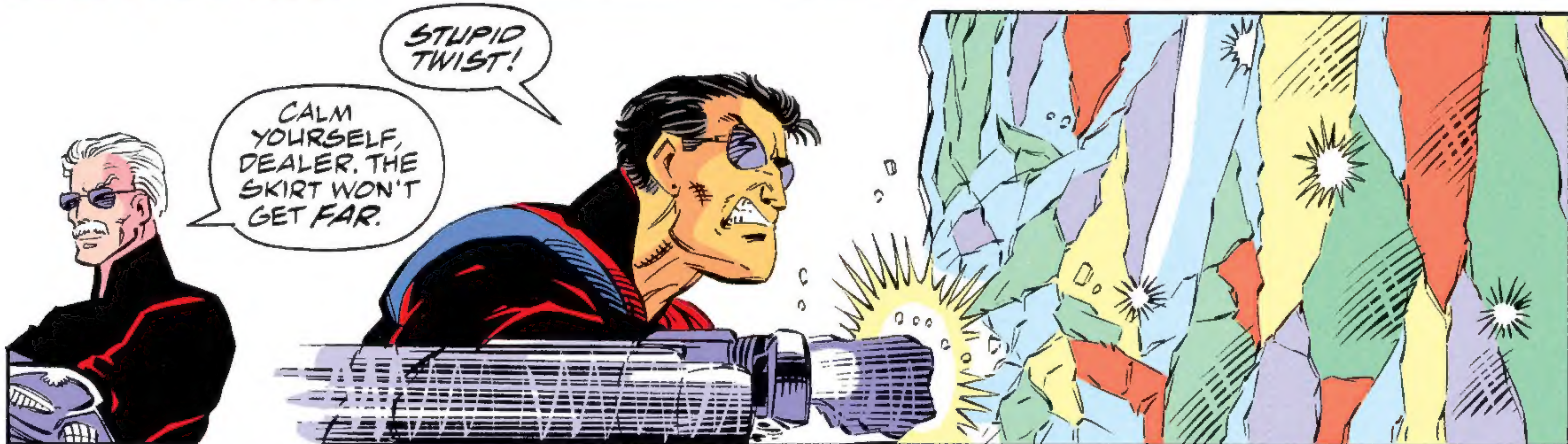
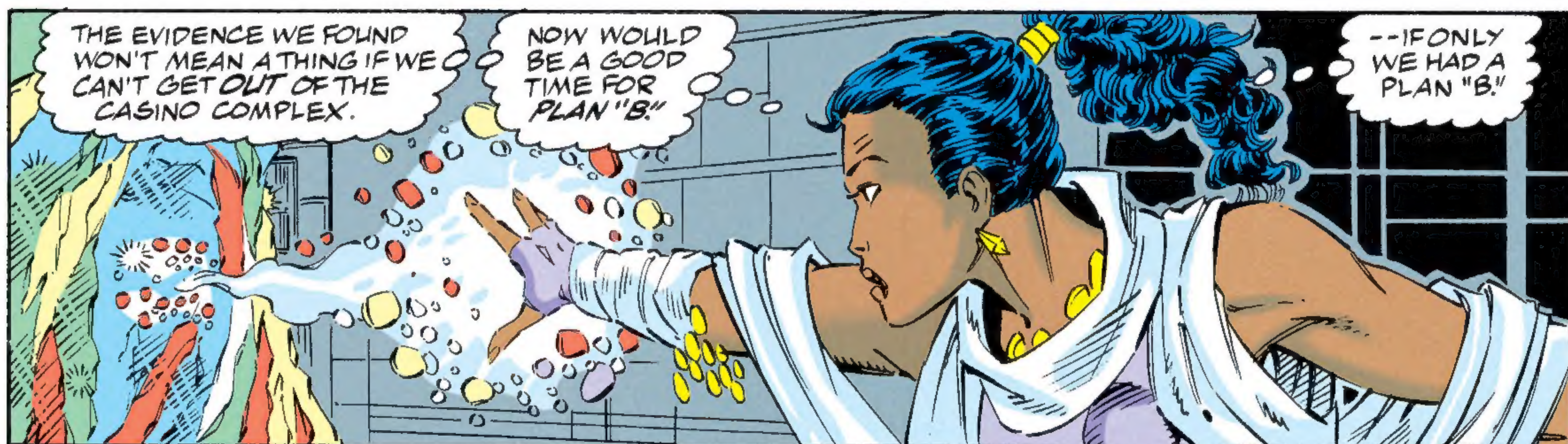


TONIGHT'S ENTERTAINMENT WILL BE PROVIDED BY THE SYNDICATE'S ELITE ENFORCERS--

--THE RAT PACK!







"--AND ANYONE IN MY WAY GETS BURIED ALONG WITH XI'AN AND HIS MUTANT CRONIES."

VVRRROOARRR-- CHUNCK

THAT'S JUNKPILE'S A.T.V.. YOU TWO SPLIT UP.

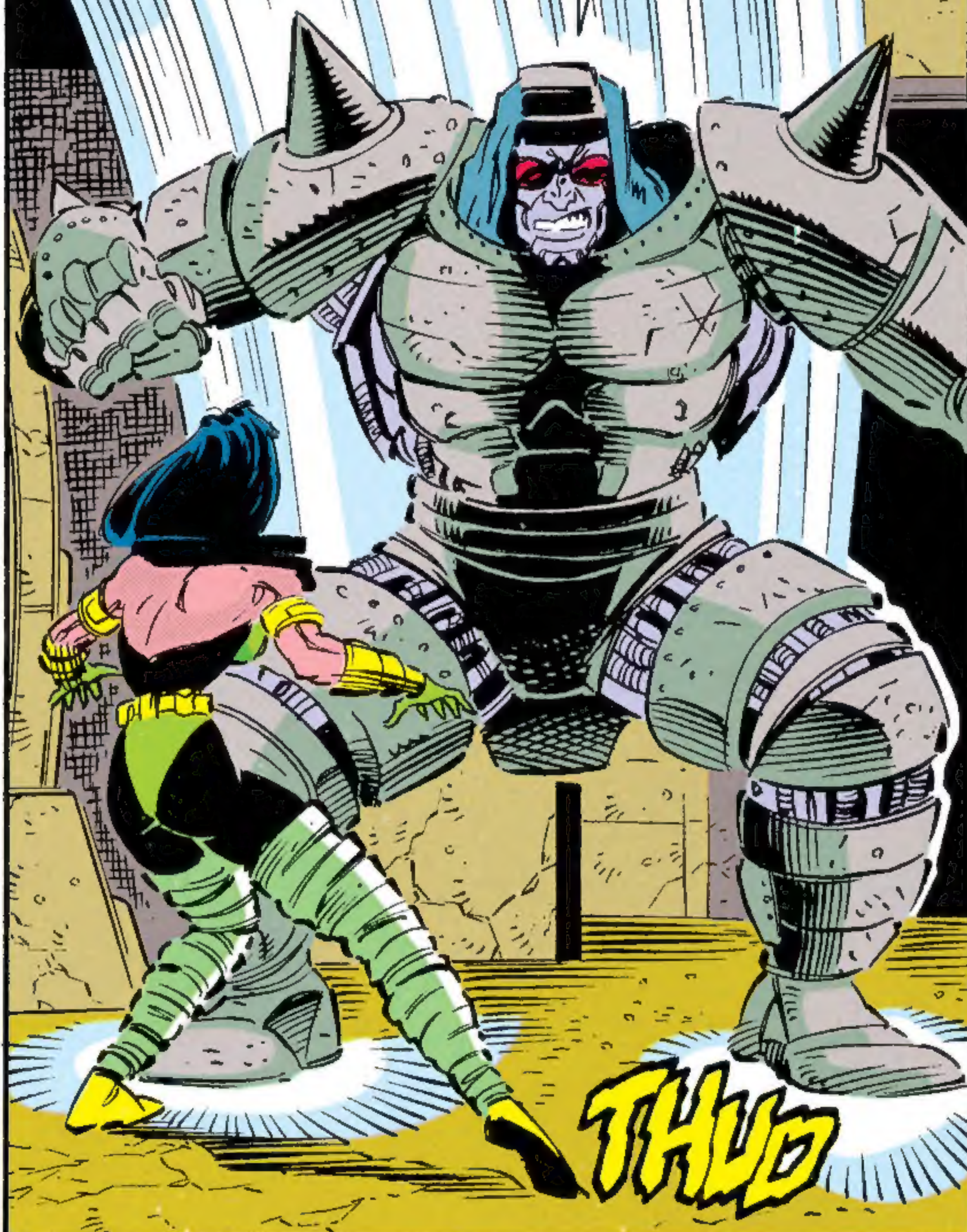
IF THINGS GO BAD, TAKE THE EXPERIENCE AND GET XI'AN AS FAR AWAY AS POSSIBLE.

BUT--

NO ARGUMENT. YOU CAN'T CONTROL YOUR POWER, AND TINA'S NO MATCH FOR--

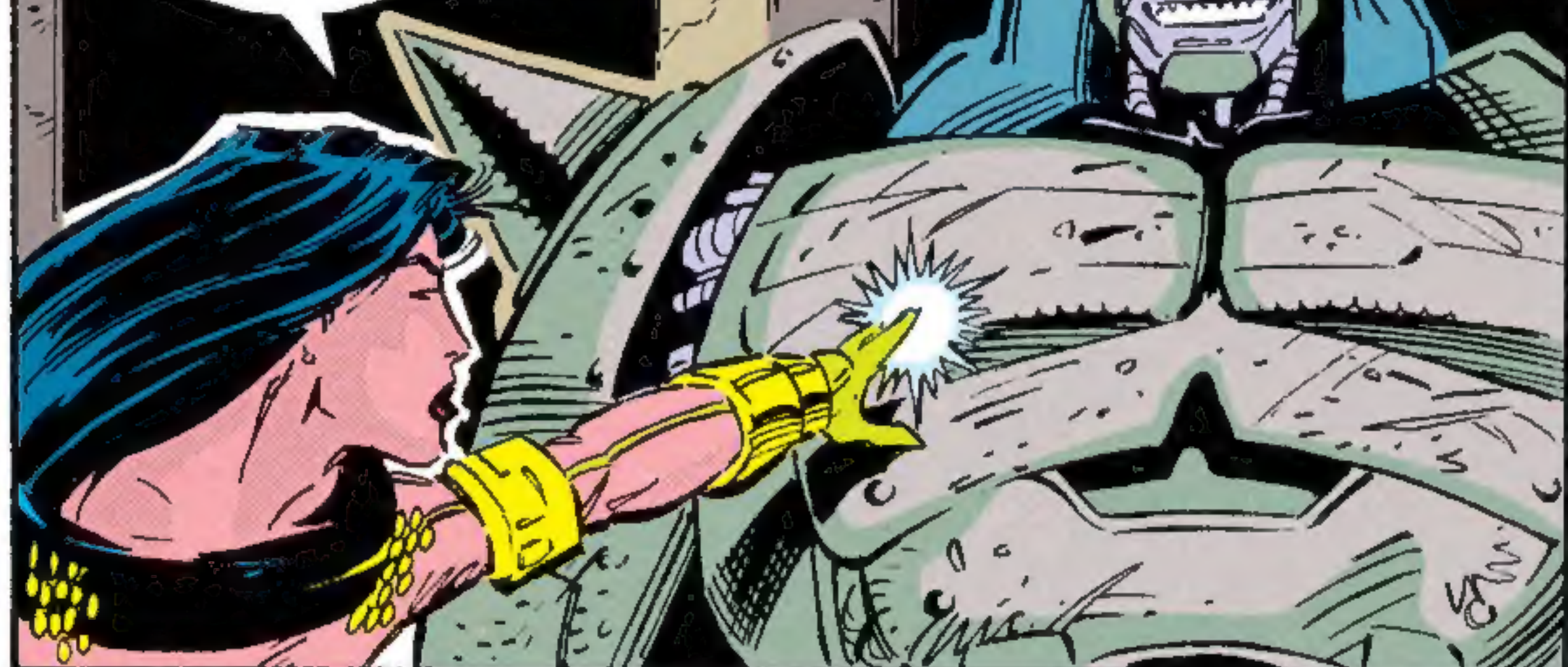


JUNKPILE?



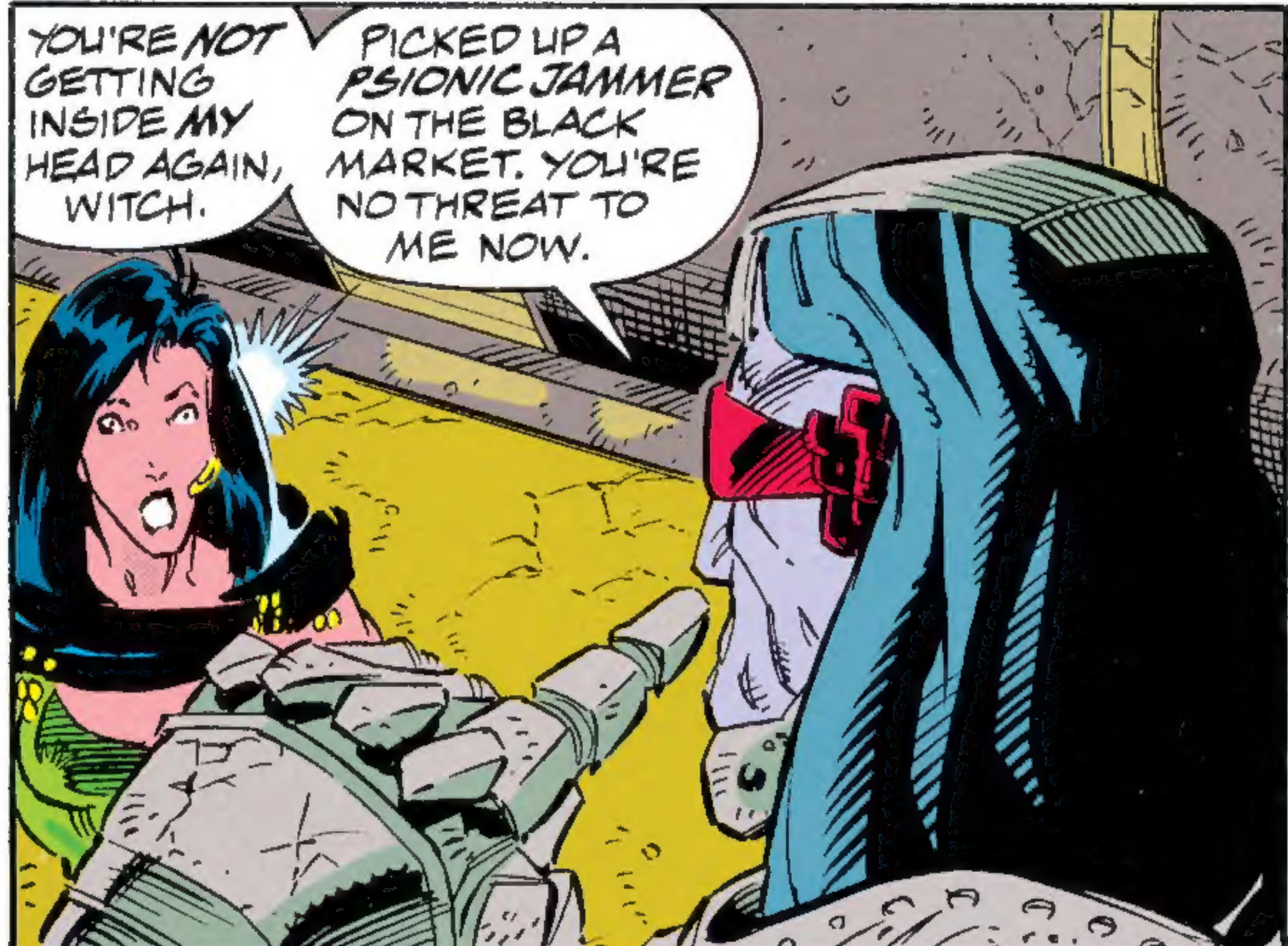
I WANT XI'AN, SHAKTI.

I'VE STOPPED YOU BEFORE.



YOU'RE NOT GETTING INSIDE MY HEAD AGAIN, WITCH.

PICKED UP A PSIONIC JAMMER ON THE BLACK MARKET. YOU'RE NO THREAT TO ME NOW.



I REMEMBER WHEN YOU SWORE YOU'D NEVER BOW DOWN BEFORE ANYONE.

NOW YOU'RE RUNNING ERRANDS FOR LYTTON AND DESDEMONA SYNGE--

--TWO FLAT-SCANS.

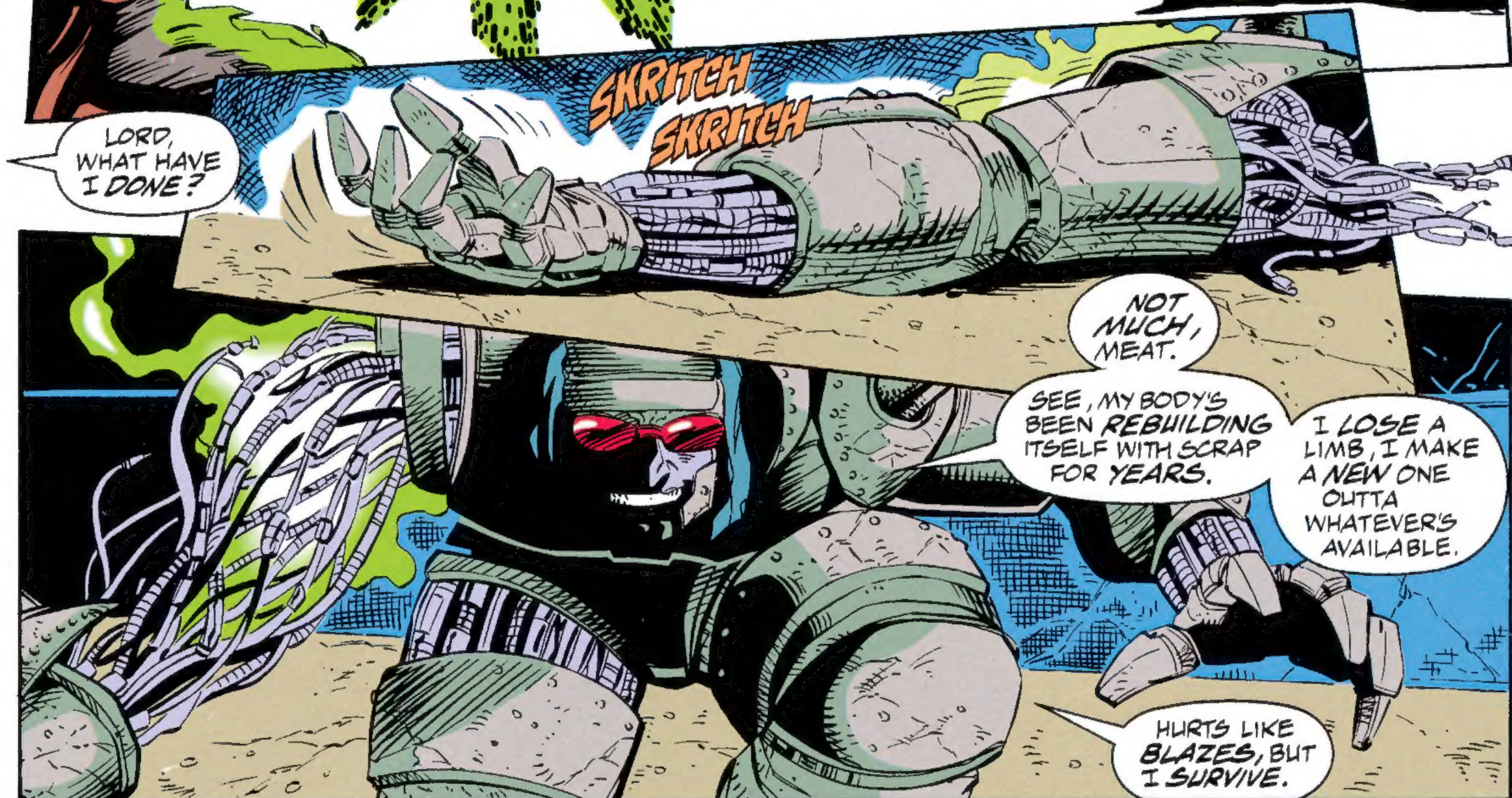
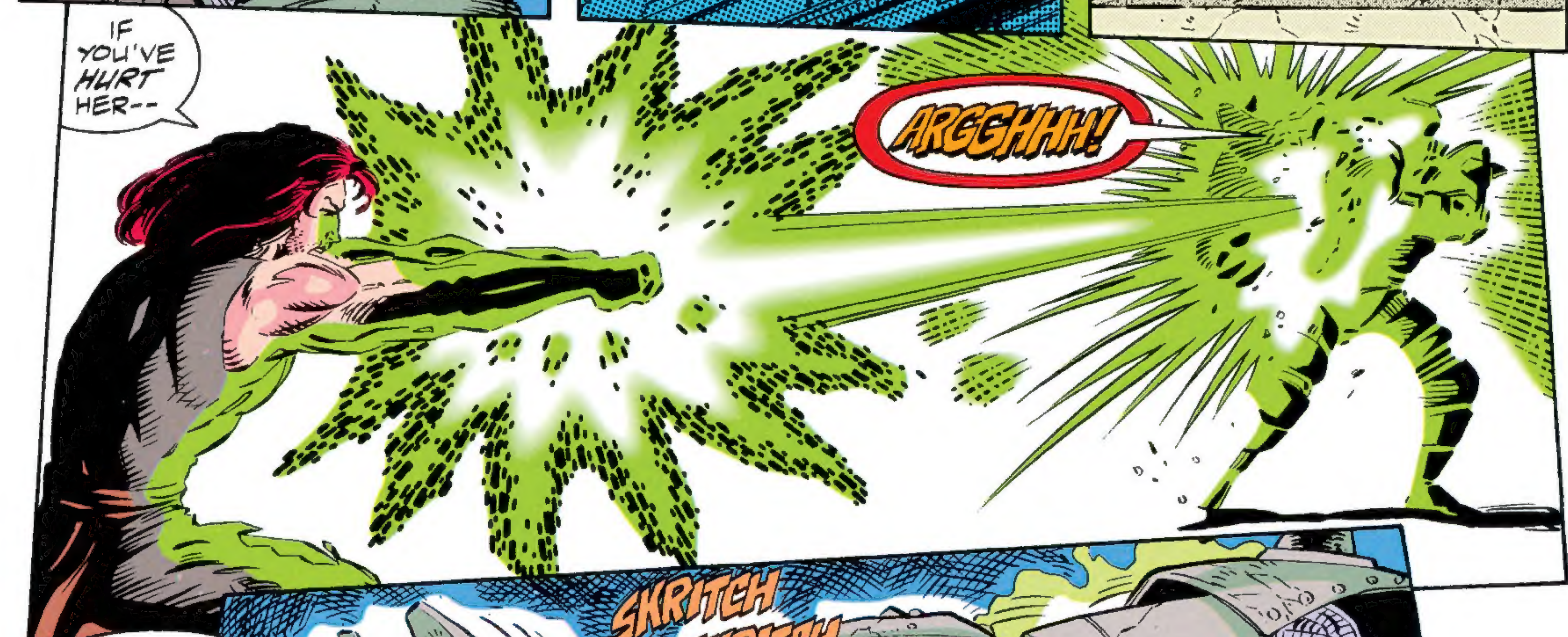
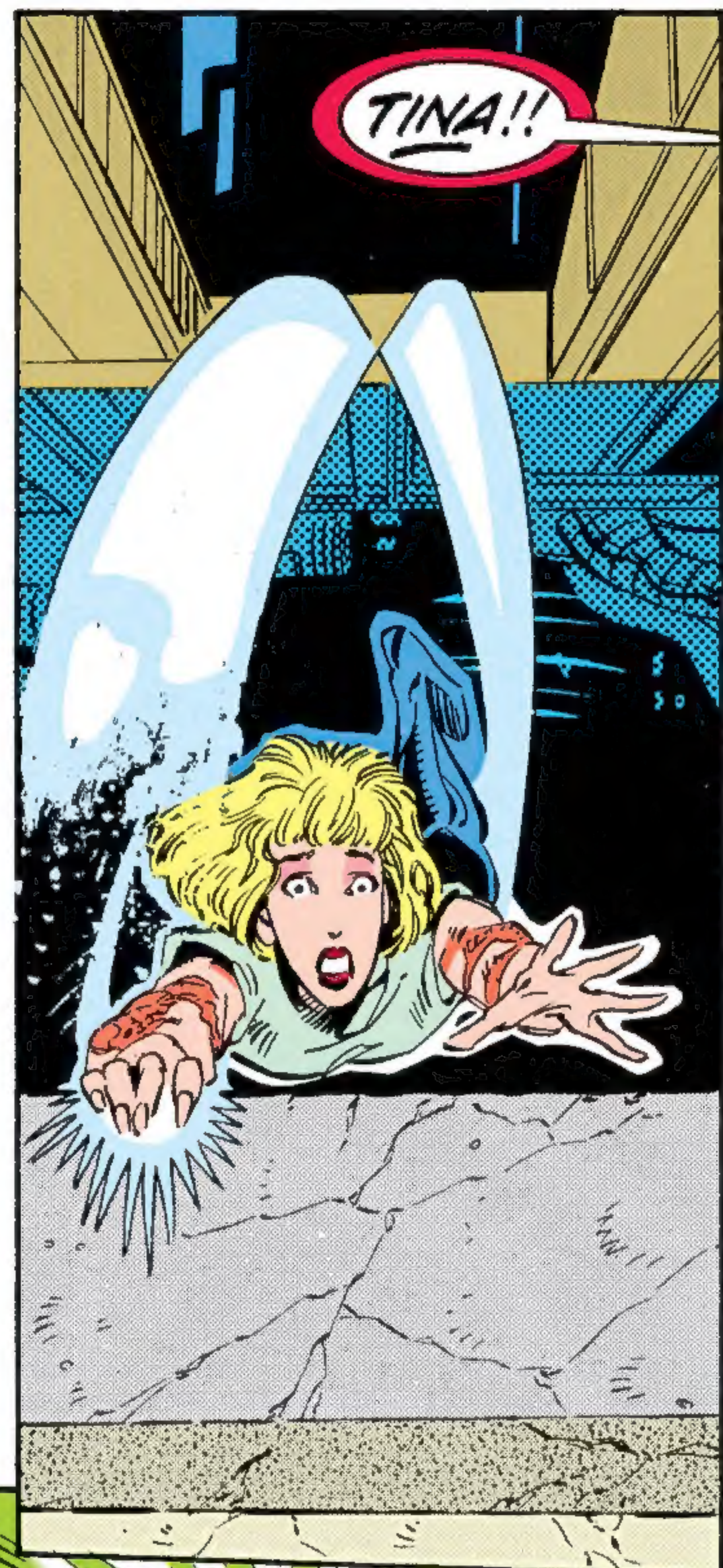
EXPERIENCE



THWAK

NEVER LIKED YOU, SHAKTI.







LET'S SEE IF YOU CAN SAY THE SAME.

URGH... CAN'T... BREATHE...

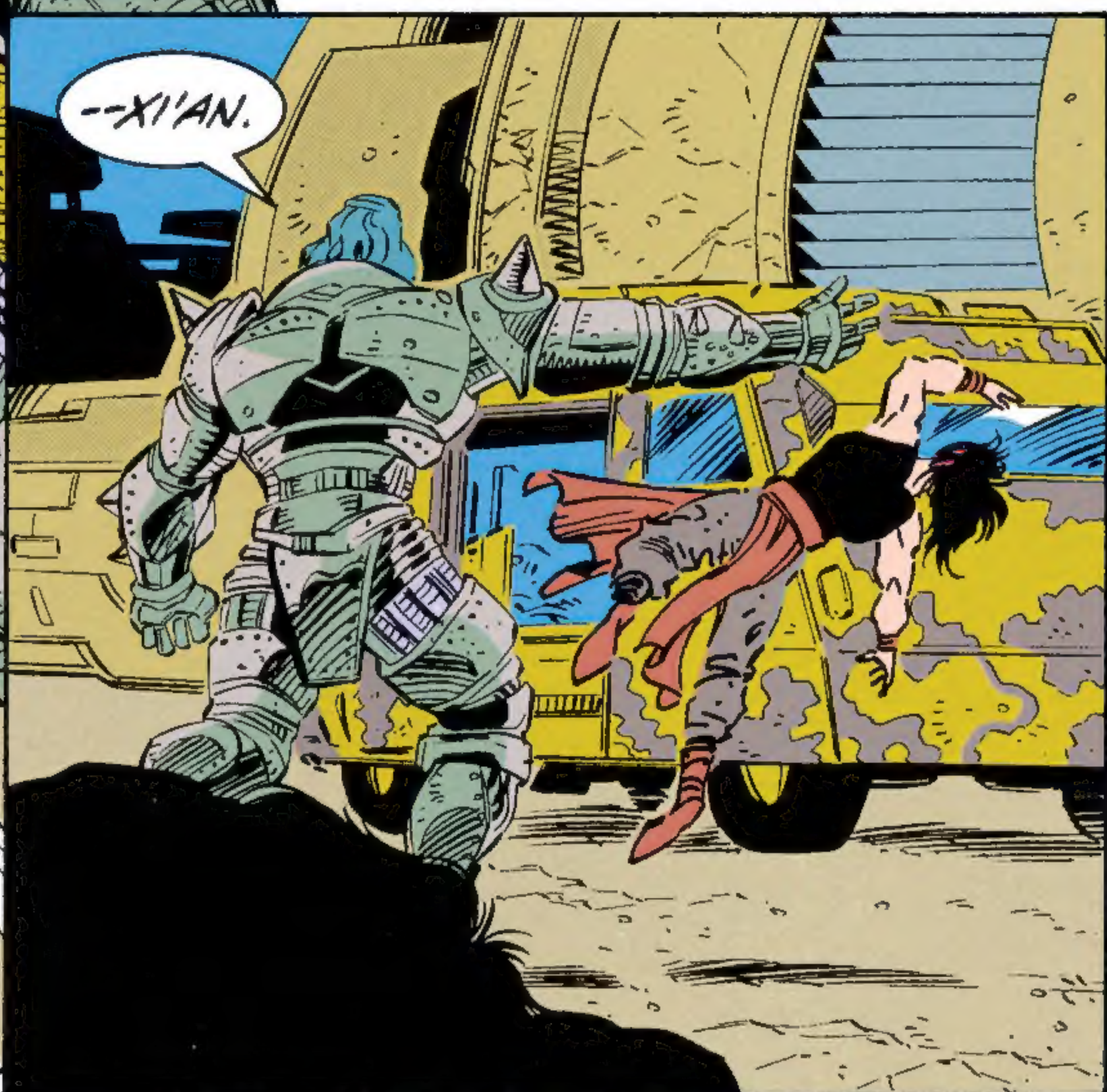
NOW I FIGURE YOU JUST SPENT WHATEVER ENERGY YOU WERE CHANNELING A MOMENT AGO.

TOO BAD. DOESN'T GIVE YOU MUCH OF A CHANCE AGAINST AN IRON GRIP, DOES IT?

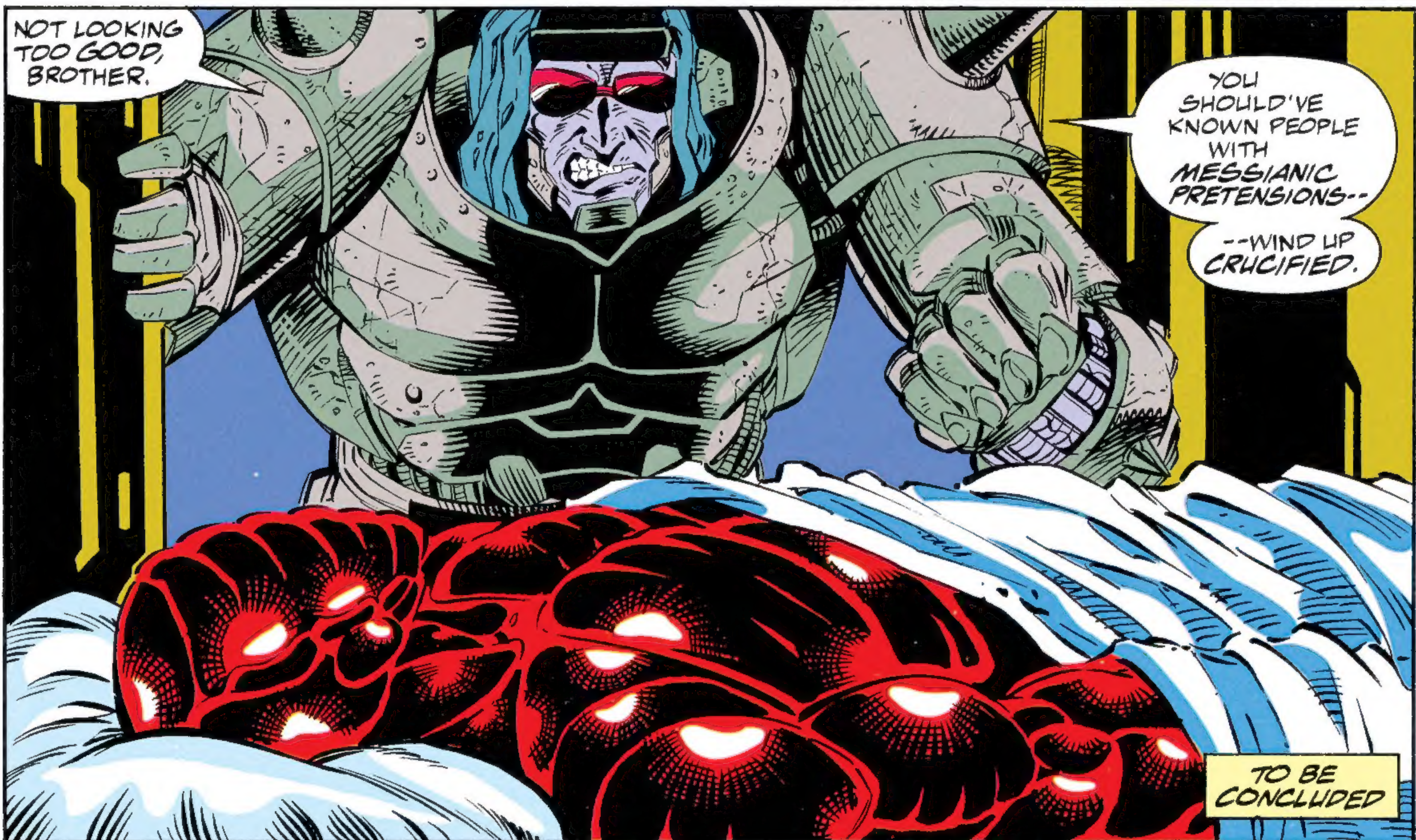


DIDN'T THINK SO.

NOW FOR WHAT I CAME FOR--



--XI'AN.



NOT LOOKING TOO GOOD, BROTHER.

YOU SHOULD'VE KNOWN PEOPLE WITH MESSIANIC PRETENSIONS--

--WIND UP CRUCIFIED.

TO BE CONCLUDED